

To Thessalonica Then, To The Temple Today

Text: I Thes. 5:16-28

It has been a joy and privilege to share what the Lord has laid upon my heart since I first started the ministry of devotional writing. However, this is only the start of what I pray will be a long, glorious, and fruitful ministry that the Lord could be honored, glorified, and magnified through.

In the closing verses of I Thessalonians, Paul gives a number of rather short, but rich doctrinal precepts that the Thessalonians needed to remember, reflect, and respond in faith and obedience to. These are holy aspects of the Christian life which they weren't falling short in, so it seemed, but they served as reminders of the new life they had and now needed to show it to those without.

Over the final thirteen verses of the first epistle to this great local church, Paul identifies fourteen aspects of the doctrine and practice that a Christian and the local church he or she is in ought to look upon, exemplify, and model. These aspects are not unique to just the Thessalonians. In each aspect, we will also look at the same command given by Paul to another church he wrote to, whether that be Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Colossae, or Philippi. He also wrote to Timothy twice and to Philemon, as well as Titus, and if these aspects be found there, we will look at those as well. This is by no means an exhaustive list. When there are so many different factors for the Christian to consider, some other important ideas and concepts get left behind. If there are some left behind, the error is mine. My prayer is that in the following devotional/paper, all that we look at will be seen in perhaps a unique light not as something new, but rather as a fresh reminder of what we should be striving for daily. With this in mind, let's begin our study.

1. Praising. "Rejoice evermore." (v. 16) Rejoicing is one of the greatest blessings a Christian can and ought to enjoy. A lost person can't rejoice the same way that a Christian can. In fact, I did a devotional ("Cause for Rejoicing") on rejoicing based on Paul's command to Philippi: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice" (4:4). In the devotional I gave three reasons why a Christians should have cause for rejoicing. My friends, three reasons are but the icing on the rejoicing cake. There are a myriad of reasons that should cause a born-again child of God to celebrate, rejoice, and praise God.

We are blessed more than we ever thought possible, and much less even deserve. All we deserve is the hottest heat of a devil's Hell. Yet God in His love showed us great mercy and pardon in the sending of His only begotten Son (John 3:16) to die a cruel, merciless death on Calvary so we have the opportunity to have our sins forgiven (it is still up to the individual to admit his lost condition, acknowledge Christ as full payment and accept Him as Lord and Saviour). If one did just that, the angels rejoiced and so do those in Heaven above (Luke 15:7). Knowing just this, a perfect answer to the question "How are you" could be summed up as "Better than I deserve!" Just for God to show us anything other than what we

should get is nothing more than His great love. Edna Worrell penned this: "I have a friend called Jesus, whose love is strong and true, and never fails howe'er tis' tried, no matter what I do, I've sinned against this love of His, but when I knelt to pray, confessing all my guilt to Him... the sin clouds rolled away! It's just like Jesus to roll the clouds away, it's just like Jesus to keep me day by day, it's just like Jesus all along the way, It's just like His great love!" His great love is what sent His Son to die for us, and shed His precious blood to cover our vile pile of sins. That is one way we surely ought to rejoice! The fact that you don't have to die for your sins is a tremendous praise to offer to our God who did it because He loved us.

Are you happy with your local church? Well, you should be, and if you are, praise God for it! Christians in China are on the move to have services and often cannot because of the persecution that goes on in that cold, communistic, Christless country. Yet here in America (for now, anyway) we have the religious freedom to worship God at a local church that preaches the Bible and has people that live by the Bible as best as they can! Not all churches are like this. Many are steeped in tradition and worship falsely. Many follow false idols or gods. Yet Bible Christianity is not fake! It is real and the people you should meet in a church like this need to show that it is real and not a placebo! We have brothers and sisters of like precious faith and practice with whom we can rejoice with. The Holy Spirit will cause us to rejoice when we see something in the Bible we hadn't viewed before, and it causes us to change and grow. That is another reason to praise God. We can experience growth in our lives by His working and convicting power, and we can praise Him for the conviction that allows us to get right, get forgiven, and get going further by serving and honoring Jesus Christ. Praise God for victory in Jesus, our Saviour forever!

Paul has given Thessalonica a lot of reason to rejoice evermore. The sixth verse of his epistle to them spoke on their joy and rejoicing over receiving the Words of God. Paul probably wrote this before any other local church or pastoral epistle, even though he had personally visited and established a number of local churches prior to his visit to Thessalonica in Acts 17. Thessalonica was used as an example (v. 6). They: "turned from idols to serve the living and true God" (v.9). It is to this local church that he explained the crown of rejoicing, one of five the believer can win at the Bema Seat (2:19). Paul rejoiced with them that they could give glory to God (3:9).

Yet perhaps the greatest rejoicing they (and we also) have is the promise that Christ will return for His won (4:13-18). H. L. Turner wrote the following: "O Lord Jesus, how long, how long, e're we shout the glad song! Christ returneth! Hallelujah! Hallelujah, amen! Hallelujah, amen. O joy o delight! Should we go without dying, no sickness, no sadness, no dread, and no crying, caught up through the clouds with our Lord into glory! When Jesus receives His own!" Christ will come again just as He had promised the disciples (John 14:2-3). We will meet the Lord in the air to- rejoice evermore!

In Heaven we will certainly be rejoicing evermore, giving honor and glory to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; but until we get there, why not rejoice evermore

now? Why not give thanks for the many gifts He's already given to you? Rejoice when a lost soul you've been praying for comes to Christ and gets saved. Rejoice when you don't feel like it. Even if the world around you is falling apart, may that occasion cause you to rejoice. Remember that God works all things for His good (cf. Rom. 8:28).

Paul also told Timothy that he was to be an example (cf. I Tim. 4:12). Thessalonica needed to remember that rejoicing is a key cog nut in the Christian life. Paul taught it, Timothy taught it, and now we can and must live it.

2. Persistent Praying. "Pray without ceasing." (v. 17) Paul mentions prayer twice over the final verses of this epistle. However, I am led to believe that there are two aspects regarding prayer, and this verse is one of the two.

As many of us often admit publicly, yet neglect privately (to our shame), prayer is something we fail often at. Yet it is absolutely critical for us who desire to live the holy Christian life to have a prayer life. Victory or defeat occurs much of the time by the amount of prayer we do and just how effective and real the believer makes their prayers. I'd like to open this section with a few NO-NO's regarding prayer: 1) Prayer is not meant to be over trivial matters. Asking for a million bucks is not a prayer I'd offer to the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. We are not to ask amiss regarding our prayers (James 4:3), that we pray not upon our lusts and desires, but rather, we are to pray regarding more spiritual matters. If what you are about to pray for is something Christ would not offer to His Father, then we shouldn't pray it. 2) Prayer is not to be done without regarding ALL sin. Confessing sin (all of it) needs to be the first thing when approaching the throne of Heaven. Some pray utilizing a popular method known by the acronym ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication). However, I disagree. The Christian ought to pray by the acronym CATS (confession, adoration, thanksgiving, supplication). The Psalmist said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). Sin, especially unchecked and unconfessed, is the reason our prayers hit the ceiling above our heads and don't reach Heaven where something can be done about them! We must therefore start our petitions with confession, remembering all sin before the Lord, and applying a firm belief in I John 1:7-9, that if we confess it, He will remove it, and will not remember it any longer. Did not He promise that last part to Jeremiah (cf. 31:34)? This is not only known sins but also for Him to reveal previously unknown sins that we can acknowledge those and pray for forgiveness. 3) We are not to pray vainly. Religions do this. As a former Lutheran, I needed to memorize the Apostles' creed, and all the prayers we needed were right in the liturgy. No wonder the church was dead! We were not heard for our much speakings (cf. Matt. 6:7)! In the model prayer offered by our Lord Jesus Christ, He mentioned before this that we were not to pray with repetition, or to pray the same thing without meaning. We almost always say the same prayer before our meals, but they should have a true meaning of thankfulness. Now, also note Christ's prayer didn't have confession first. That's simply because He had none! He didn't have a need to confess sin, but we do, and we must pray with meaning. Let's also do much

of our praying in secret (Matt. 6:6). Many churches offer a mid-week service where they will take prayer requests and pray regarding them, but other than that and the normal prayers in services or for special services, the Christian should pray in secret, in his prayer closet, so the Lord can reward them, and not have the one praying being praised by others. Be simple and do the knee time in the privacy of your prayer closet.

Prayer should be often and persistent. Even going about our days' business we should be in intercession, maybe just for the Lord to protect you out on the open roads of life, or a need arises via text message or phone call or email. Frustration of a job can and should cause you to ask the Lord for grace.

Paul wrote to Ephesus: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (6:18). The always part is the part I want us to highlight. No matter what we are doing, we can devote a side aspect to the Lord to just pray. It doesn't have to be aloud. It doesn't have to be eloquent or elaborate. Rather, let's just continually pray for others' needs, our needs, and wisdom and discernment in our walk with the Lord. The aspects are there. Prayer is to be done and can be done a lot more often than a lot of us think or admit to. We can do it. We don't have to be on our knees to intervene. We just need be in fellowship with Him, apply the three NO-NO's we studied earlier, then seek His face in deep intercession and know that He will hear us and answer us. He also told Jeremiah this: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." (33:3)

God desires each and every one of his children to be in constant fellowship with Him, and the best way to do this is through the avenue of prayer. He has given us the confidence to do so and to do it properly (cf. I John 5:14-15). Let us boldly do so, and depend upon Him to answer our persistent prayers according to His perfect and right will.

3. Persecution. "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (v. 18) For over two and a half years in my Christian life I have seen the need to rejoice. Growing up I never really wanted to rejoice and was never happy about much of anything (if you want to know more about my upbringing, please email me regarding a copy of my personal testimony). When I got saved, that all changed. My life verse then became an exclamation of what Paul told Philippi: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice " (4:4). However lately I have experienced very little in the way of rejoicing (though I still have cause to do this) and more so in the way of various trials and tribulations as I grow and try to walk with the Lord. When I studied this verse out for this devotional, I realized quickly what an encouragement and challenge this verse was. I have changed my life verse now to reflect this "newfound" aspect that I now want to dwell upon.

Nobody I have ever encountered in the outside, secular world likes the idea of persecution. Yet persecution is one of the staples in a believer's eternal security. God tries those who are His, and the chastisement can and probably will involve persecution. Paul most certainly suffered for the sake of our Saviour. In the second

epistle to the church at Corinth, Paul describes what he endured with gladness: "... of the Jews received I forty stripes save one" (11:24). Back in the day of Moses (cf. Deuteronomy 25:3) corporal punishment was administered in the form of stripes, usually done with a whip, and it could be as many as forty times the guilty one was whipped, but they were commanded strictly NOT to go over. As a general rule of thumb, the Jews, exercising this form of "discipline" on Paul, decided to stop at thirty-nine each time. This man was flogged 195 times. He probably had severe back pain from this beating at the hands of the unbelieving Jews. "Once I was stoned..." (v. 25) refers to the brief death he had after being stoned at Iconium. Jews traveled over a hundred miles to try and destroy Paul's message, but God's Word would have prevailed even if He decided not to raise Paul outside of the city (cf. Acts 14:19-20). He had gone through three different shipwrecks; one of which may very well have been on his way to Rome (Acts 27). He continued all he had endured in the following verse; but He gives the glory to God.

Today man brags about overcoming this and overcoming that. It is the popular doctrine of self-esteem and confidence. We call this pride. Pride is one thing we must constantly be aware of. After coming out of a trial, we must remember to deflect the glory upon God, lest we brag and become prideful and God have to humble us with another trial. We only accomplish what we do by the grace of God; therefore, He gets the honor and the glory.

We should give thanks for the trials of life. Peter knows more than a thing or two about trials. In his first epistle, Peter dedicates time to talking about trials and says that the trial of your faith is: "much more precious than of gold that perisheth" (1:7). He also said that we should be happy to suffer for righteousness' sake (3:13-17), view Christ's suffering example (3:18-22), and perhaps all of chapter four sums up giving thanks in everything, whether good, which most of the time it is, or bad.

Everyone who penned a book or more than one of the books of the Bible suffered. Each of the apostles suffered greatly for the cause of Christ. Therefore I believe it is God's Will that if we truly believe, we will suffer persecution, especially in the last days (cf. 2 Timothy 3:1-5). This is something we should not fret or be overburdened by. It is another thing to give thanks for, because we know then that we are His and we are in His perfect will. Let's remember that the trial could be of our own doing, because of unconfessed sin or a vice sin that we have failed to ask for the help of God in getting the victory over the vice. If your trial is not because of this, then rejoice. You can be afflicted and still give thanks in spite of your suffering. We may not suffer to the degree that many did, including the One who suffered the most on our behalf, but nevertheless we should be prepared to endure hardness, as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 2:3).

Horatio Spafford lost many possessions in the great Chicago fire (1871). While preparing for a trip overseas, he learned of the death of his four children in a boating accident. He wrote the following, in a boat of his own passing near where the incident occurred: "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrow like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul." Whatever we go through, it should be well with our souls too.

4. Prevention. "Quench not the Spirit." (v. 19) This is vital, as the Holy Spirit is the heartbeat of the Christian who desires to live and do right. The Holy Spirit is bestowed upon the believer after they truly trust in Jesus Christ to save them from their sins. This is another reason why Jesus died for us, so He could send us the Comforter (cf. John 14:16). Once one has the Holy Spirit, it is in them forever, and if the believer permits the Spirit to do its work, the Spirit will begin a good work in them and: "perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil.1:6)

So what do I mean by the believer "allowing it" (that is, the Holy Spirit) to perform the good work day in and day out? The believer must remain in fellowship with God. It all traces back to sin. In the garden, Adam and Eve had quite the fellowship with God before they fell into sin. Now there was a chasm there, and when the individual trusts Christ as their Saviour, the Holy Spirit becomes the other side of the conduit with God Almighty. However, a conduit is only good if it holds the charge between two electrical devices. The same goes true for the Holy Spirit. It can only work if we are in fellowship with God. When a believer commits a sin, the fellowship immediately ceases, and we are not aware of such more often than not. A believer then needs to confess and forsake that sin as such to restore the fellowship and permit the Holy Spirit to get back to work in the wonderful ministry He has. If the believer fails to acknowledge that sin, there is no fellowship, and that opens the door for Satan to possibly tempt one further, lead them into severe backsliding, and also causes God great grief. In an attempt to draw a believer back into much needed restoration, God may send a trial into that believer's life. It can be anything and everything, but God wants your heart, Christian. Sin quenches the Spirit, and further unconfessed sin causes rebellion and stubbornness, and brings about God's chastening hand. He may take away an opportunity for you to get a blessing. The case in point is God rejecting one from being king for the person rejecting His Words knowingly (cf. I Sam. 15:23, the example of Saul, who did wrong in the sight of God and not killing Agag as he was sternly told by God to do as such). Paul challenged the Ephesian church to: "grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (4:30). Paul continues with a laundry list of sins over the previous verses and verse 31 as those that would grieve the Spirit and cause friction in the relationship the Christian needs to have with God.

The body is now, for the believer, a temple of the Holy Ghost, who indwells with us. Therefore we must take care of the only body the Lord will give to us here on earth (cf. I Cor. 6:19-20). Things such as smoking, drinking, and poor diet will eventually catch up to you and shorten your potential lifespan to honor and serve God. Sure, one could argue that an exercise freak could die the next day, healthy people could perish in a moment's notice and the same goes for a younger individual, but those people, like we, all rely on the grace of God. We should do our part to maximize the potential God has instilled in us.

Therefore, in order to "quench not the Spirit", we must quickly recognize and realize we have sinned and confess it immediately to the Lord to restore the conduit between the soul and the Spirit. Tindley wrote: "Nothing between my soul and the

Saviour, so that His blessed face may be seen. Nothing preventing the least of His favor. Keep the way clear! Let nothing between." This refers to not quenching the Spirit. We must keep the way clear.

Don't allow sin to be the proverbial plaque that covers you from fellowship and fruit. Instead, take time to be holy, allow the Spirit to work in and through you, and be the blessing that you ought and need to be. Perhaps this point is known as a prevention of fellowship interruption. Only you can prevent the quenching of the Holy Spirit, sent by God, to work in and through you. Lest we miss out on blessings, opportunities, and the like, let nothing between.

5. Preservation. "Despise not prophesyings." (v. 20) This fifth aspect is a very key and popular doctrine amongst independent Baptists today. This speaks to the preservation of Scripture.

Paul, nor any of his churches, had the complete Scriptures yet. Not only did he still have churches to write to, but John had not yet penned all of what he did (a gospel account of Christ, three epistles, and the Revelation of Christ). This is why Paul alluded to this as important in his time of writing to Thessalonica.

Prophesyings were Spirit-driven and given to chosen individuals so they could be properly taught, applied, and lived in each local church, Thessalonica included. These local churches needed to have the latest important teachings, and without the complete written revelation of the New Testament just yet, prophesyings were just as important to the local assembly as the apostle was. Paul wrote: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers..." (I Cor. 12:28).

However, as the written Words of God were published and completed in the 90's AD, this ministry was withdrawn as a necessary avenue of reaching local churches. Paul concluded this by saying to Corinth, as an original argument for charity: "Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away" (I Cor. 13:8). This is why none of the "prophesies" predicted today come true. This is yet another reason why May 21, 2011 never came to pass (much to the chagrin of one Harold E. Camping).

The simple fact that this links itself to preservation is because during all this time, the church had prayed about and made decisions concerning acceptable Scripture and what was not. Meanwhile, the churches had to handwrite copy after copy because the original letter they received from Paul was in bad shape after so many uses. God preserved all the good handwritten copies, as He promised to preserve His Words a number of times in Scripture (Ps. 12:6-7 is one such example), and we have them today. Sadly, those so called copies they "found" buried were buried for a reason. They may date back to the right time, but they were miscopied. Many of these were then twisted as such, reformed, and became many of the abhorrent translations today. The two men credited with this watering down of Holy Writ (Westcott and Hort) were scholars, but not believers. Who were they to get involved in this! While there is still truth in some of these other versions, and

one can be saved using a modern translation, the King James still, above all, remains the most accurate translation of these thousands of copies made by the local churches over the 1500 plus years prior to the 1611 release of the KJB and is the Book nearest and dearest to each true believer's heart. Do also note that a few translations prior to the 1611 KJB were also translated from the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, and are also accurate.

So after the ministry of prophesyings ceased, teaching then became of utmost importance. We have the true preserved Words of God and now they and we alike need men to teach and proclaim them unashamedly, unapologetically, and rightly. Did not Christ tell the local church to: "Teach (ing) them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...?" (Matt. 28:20)

The message concerning prophesyings not being despised can be summarized by this: "Despise not the teachings of the Word and those who teach them." (Morris, commentary notes on I Thes. 5:20, The Henry Morris Study Bible, KJV) I couldn't agree more. To despise such truly biblical teaching is utter rebellion and will bring swift chastening upon the saved soul, and Hell and damnation for all who have heard and rejected such Bible teachings that go on in the house of God every time the doors are open.

6. Proving. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (v.21) In my fourth grade science class (many years ago), we had to make a carton for a raw egg and drop the carton, with egg inside, from the top of our three story elementary school building, to asphalt 35 feet below. When the drop was completed people checked to see if their egg survived. They were allowed to fill the carton with whatever they wanted in hopes that the raw egg made the journey safely.

While that illustration was not all that it is cracked up to be, the point I want to make is that we are trying to prove the filled carton worthy to carry a raw egg for a freefalling 35 foot descent. Just like proving the carton, a Christian needs to run all things and all aspects of our lives through a proverbial Litmus test (another great science illustration). The measuring stick is the Word of God, and Paul commanded the church at Thessalonica to: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good".

We should measure everything by the Book. If you disagree with what you heard, check it with the Bible. If you're unsure about whether something is profitable or less than desirable in your walk, go to the Source. Prove what was taught in your last class or sermon. Make sure it is biblically sound and supported (verses to strengthen and articulate a point are usually given). Check the Scripture reference(s) on your own time to make sure it lines up-it should!

Thessalonica wasn't the only church exhorted to this. Berea was well documented for receiving: "the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). No matter how long one has been teaching or preaching Scripture, every believer, young and old, new convert or seasoned saint, should do such. Don't rely on one who is preaching to always be right, because they, just like you, are a sinner. That also means I am a sinner as well, and you should constantly prove what the Lord has given me to make

sure I'm being doctrinally and biblically sound, and call me out when I make a mistake. I'm sure I will, but I pray what the Lord gives me is correct. If it isn't, remember this: He is right and I am wrong.

If you prove it and it is indeed good, then stick to it. Study to show yourself approved unto God (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). If it results in a change, resolve to change and stick to it, with God's help. Retain it and commit what is good to memory.

Furthermore, if called upon it, you can prove whether one deed done by somebody is good or not. Peter says: "...be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you of the hope that is in you..." (I Pet. 3:15). You may even guide a person to believe that they need Christ to save them and they would respond in a positive manner and accept Him.

If you are in doubt over whether an activity you are doing in your life is profitable or not, measure it by God's Word. Question your walk. Can it be improved more so? Am I doing this right? Rightly divide the Word of truth. Let's not ask, "is there anything wrong with this?". Rather, let's ask, "is this profitable to my walk or will this not honor God?" My prayer for all of you is that we will be Bereans, and show ourselves approved unto God each and every day.

7. Positive Promotion. "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (v.22) What may not be evil to many today, including those who profess to be Christians, is totally evil to the born again believer who trembles at the Words of God. While there are too many things to even begin to list in this devotional, the obvious evils should stick out like a sore thumb. These are stumblingblocks and one who does that could cause another to fall, and that is not going to be good for the believer who causes another to stumble in their walk with the Lord. Paul here is simply stating that we should abstain (not participate) from anything that may be evil.

Certainly for these Thessalonian believers an appearance of evil was idol worship. Much like Ephesus, Thessalonica was big into the gods and goddesses of the time. They were paid homage to, worshipped, adored, and admired by these people. Ephesus was a big supporter of the goddess Diana, and when Paul, Silas, and others started preaching the gospel and seeing the city turn to Christ, upset those who made a living off of the idol worshipers. Case in point: Demetrius (Acts 19). He was a silversmith and his occupation was to make idols of this goddess for a living. Apparently, he was pretty well to do by this point, so of course he'd be upset when people turned from gods which were made with hands to serve the true and living God (cf. I Thes. 1:9). Thessalonica and Ephesus both turned from idol worship to ideal worship. Now for us idol worship may not be to the extreme that had gone on for centuries, but it may not be that particular thing we struggle with. Perhaps we have a love for money, or a job that keeps us out of church when we ought to be present. Maybe sports dominates our lives and takes precedence over the Lord. This is not only unwholesome, but it is a replacement for the relationship that should dominate and affect every aspect of your life. There is and never will be any idol that for the Christian ought to replace the God of Heaven who hears and hearkens unto our prayers. Anything that draws more attention than God and

eternal things is an idol.

Another issue that surrounds Christianity today is the issue of whether or not believers should consume alcoholic beverages. Many will even claim that Timothy was told to take wine for the stomach issues he had, because the water at that time was unprofitable for him (cf. I Tim. 5:23). Paul I believe would not allow him to be intoxicated, because one of the requirements of a pastor is that they are to "not be given to much wine". Furthermore Solomon said "Wine is a mocker..." (Prov. 20:1). Timothy was probably told to have unfermented grape juice. The Bible is clear as to what alcohol does to a person and that a Christian needs to abstain from any consumption of it period. Too much damage is caused by a simple neglect of this command. How many souls perish due to drunk driving? How many lives are devastated by liquor? How much financial ruin does it cause a family? What about the emotional ramifications to the family members afflicted by the consumer of such evil?

Now alcohol isn't the only appearance of evil, but again, there are so many evils that they cannot be listed here. Instead of promoting evil, believer, why not promote evangelism? Promote things of eternal value. Consider Christ and count the cost. Why, Christian, would we want to go back to the way things were before we got saved? We failed miserably! That's why we came to Christ, so He could take charge and set us free!

Sad is the day when the average Christian doesn't see what is wrong with something, so they do it anyway. If it doesn't positively benefit your walk or someone else's walk, why do it? Let's seek to do things that we know are right and honor God, and let that be something we showcase to the world. Perhaps the best fitting description of this verse is instead of having problems with whether something is evil or not evil, let's positively promote good things that serve the purpose of worshipping and honoring the Lord in each and every one of our lives.

8. Peace. "And the very God of peace..." (v.23) Let's look now at the impact of God's peace upon our lives. Jesus said in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you..." What the world will tell you is peace is a far cry from the peace that can only be found when a person knows Christ as their Lord and Saviour. What some call bringing peace leaves multitudes of others in pieces. Some religions believe peace is just for them, by bringing chaos and killing others in the name of their god. If this be the case how much peace was there in the world the day nineteen cowards, believing in their god and his false promises, peace being one of them, hijacked planes, crashed them into buildings and fields and taking 3,000 people with them? Is there more peace now in that three U.S. embassies have been overtaken in the name of peace? Any religion that promotes this type of violence is a false religion. Maybe to some it brings peace, but that is NOT the peace of many more people.

Only the peace that comes from God will satisfy. The songwriter penned: "Peace, peace, wonderful peace, coming down from the Father above..." Isaiah remarked: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon thee,

because he trusteth in thee." (26:3). The Christian whose entire focus is dedicated to Christ alone will be and remain in perfect peace. He knows Who is still on the throne. His mind does not wander and he shall not be moved. No matter what make shake around him, he will only be stirred to do more. That is what one who is in perfect peace will believe and he is confident in the Lord.

Paul said, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). Peace as it truly needs to be can only come from God, and we must be at peace with Him. One must remember that in order to have this type of peace, they must know Jesus Christ and what He did for them, then accept it by faith.

9. Progressive Sanctification. "...sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (v.23) God is not only the author of perfect peace, but He is also the author of progressive sanctification. This is an important Bible teaching. When we repented of our sins and received Jesus Christ, the holy Spirit took up residence in our soul. The Holy Spirit then begins its ministry of starting a work in the believer's heart and life, from the inside out. Paul said: "Being confident in this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). If we were left to ourselves to keep our salvation, as some teach, we'd lose it, guaranteed! Yet God will not let us go. Once we are saved, we are saved forever, and no man is able to pluck them out of the Lord's hands (cf. John 10:27-30). God will begin and continue, until we meet Him one glorious day, to work in us and change us to be more like Him, in the glorious knowledge that one day the finished product will be revealed in Heaven. Yet we cannot change overnight. A person who has struggled with a life vice prior to their conversion will be convicted over time of their need to change. They will not change overnight, but it is a work in progress. This is where the continual conviction of sin will occur, and the "foolishness of preaching" (I Cor. 1:21) will manifest itself.

When the department of transportation embarks on a major interstate renovation project, it seems like it will never end and we will look at construction delays forever. However, when the project is finally completed, traffic usually flows smoother than it had before and the result is faster travel time. Much of the same is true in our lives. God is doing the repair work from years of sin in each of our lives, and while we don't see immediate results, we know that our progress will be able to be measured over the course of time, and we will be finished only when we enter the Pearly Gates. Until then, we will continually be reprogrammed, reconfigured, and renewed through refinement in the Words of God.

10. Power. "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." (v. 24) God's power is demonstrated throughout Holy Writ and Paul has seen just a glimpse of it in his life. Let's consider the power God demonstrated to Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). Paul (then Saul) was a blasphemer, injurious, a Pharisee who thought he was doing right but was in reality far from it. As he sought to inflict believers, he

was struck and blinded by the Lord Jesus, who asked him why he persecuted them. Paul didn't answer that question but yet openly responded with the infamous "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" That should be the question every Christian should petition the Lord right when they start their day in their morning devotionals. Paul basically said that whatever God would have for him that he would do it, and God showcased His power yet again by saving his soul and using him to be one of the greatest missionaries ever. If "the chief of sinners" (cf. I Tim. 1:15) could be saved, then: "the vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives" ("To God Be The Glory", Fanny Crosby). It is the power of the cross that allows men and women the glorious privilege to know Christ as Lord and Saviour. We are benefiting from God's power to save our wretched souls from Hell if we repent and believe.

God doesn't only save, though; He also sanctifies us by His power. Paul said in Phil. 1:6 that: "...He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." God's power is tapped in through the conduit of the Holy Spirit.

If God has called you to do anything, we must remember that He is faithful. Jeremiah lamented for much of his book and also Lamentations, yet one precious nugget pertaining to His faithfulness is found in Lam. 3:22-23: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness." As much as we flounder, falter, are found faithless, and fumble; we are not consumed, but rather, forgiven if we confess and forsake. If it's not committed already to memory for you, dear Christian, consider I John 1:9 as a good start. God's power is manifested through His faithfulness to allow us to do all things.

If George Mueller can run England's largest orphanage, and Eric Lidell can die in a camp as a tremendous witness and testimony for Jesus Christ, then we have example of God's faithfulness and know we can accomplish anything God puts us to. He will do it through us with His power if we just humble ourselves, believe that He will do it, and let His work be seen in you. Just look at the turnaround in those at Thessalonica and other churches speak for themselves.

11. Personal Praying. "Brethren, pray for us." (v. 25) In verse 17 Paul said to the church at Thessalonica: "Pray without ceasing." That related to an aspect of praying where one should be persistent. Here in verse 25 Paul speaks of prayer that it should not only be persistent like in verse 17, but also *personal*.

Paul was getting real personal with those in this assembly, even though he was writing this from afar. He knew straight out he couldn't do this on his own or even the few he was with. Not only was he praying for them to be strong in their walk, but he was asking them to pray for him to be strong in his walk and also for this mission to continue as long as God would have it to go.

When we pray, we should mention each person by name, just like when we confess our sins, we ought to name each sin. It is like those who are compromisers and cause divisions, as well as err doctrinally. Paul told the Roman church: "Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to

the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (16:17). That spoke of those in the local church that did this but I believe it also applies to knowing and naming false prophets, such as Joseph Smith (the founder of the Mormon cult) and Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses); but we also mark false teachers, such as Harold Camping (the man responsible for the May 21,2011 wrong prediction that Christ would return). The same should come out when we name individuals to the Lord for a certain prayer. The prayer could be for them to grow stronger in Christ, to get better, or for them to be bold in witness. Paul needed these, no doubt, but there were more aspects than just the few I declared there.

Certain people should always attract a certain prayer type from us. The lost need prayer, that God would work in their heart and bring them to the point where they will repent and turn to Christ. If a lost person ever asks you to pray for them regarding a certain need, as long as it is a request you would petition the God of Heaven for, pray for that need, but also remember that it is important that we seek His face that we can use that as a witnessing opportunity. Salvation has to be the most important thing for the non-believer in terms of prayer requests.

James exhorted his readers to pray four times regarding personal issues. If they were afflicted, they were to pray (5:13). Those that were sick called in the elders to pray over them (v. 14). He mentions a prayer of faith in v. 15. Verse 16 commanded prayer for healing, usually if one had sinned against another. James gave the example of Elijah's prayer causing a 42 month drought, then another prayer brought rain (v. 17-18). Personal prayer is vital to one who is a Christian praying for another Christian.

Together with Paul's plea in v.17, verse 25 is just another reminder for what we should be doing in our prayer closets (cf. Matt. 6:6). Be persistent with your prayers, and be personal. You use names to mark error. Now use names and diligence, and may the God of Heaven enhance, enrich, and empower those whom we pray for. If we count on others to do this for us, then we ought to be counted on for doing the exact same thing.

12. Presence. "Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss." (v. 26) We are simply told and taught here that we are to enjoy one another's presence.

The holy kiss was an early church greeting. When they gathered, the men did this with other men, and ladies together likewise. What exactly the greeting entailed, that we are unsure of. Christians today though certainly greet one another. The ladies would sometimes have a quick embrace, and the men usually shake hands, just like a business meeting. It was a sign of enjoying one's presence while they were together for the time.

This indicator of Christian love was exhorted to other churches in addition to Thessalonica. Paul told the Romans: "Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you" (16:16). It was a simple greeting to be exchanged by those alike in faith, doctrine, worship, and practice. Corinth was also told to do the same (I Cor. 16:20), with Paul sharing likewise from those he was with on his journey. Corinth was reminded to do this again (II Cor. 13:12-13). Philippi was told

to "salute every saint in Christ Jesus" (4:21).

Christians ought to enjoy being with one another. The bond of two people in Christ is even different than two lost people together. Paul told the Hebrews: "Let brotherly love continue" (13:1). The prophet Amos remarked: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (3:3) A Christian and a lost person don't have the same union. That is the point Paul made to Corinth in his exhortation for them not to pair up with lost people in areas of business or even marriage (cf. II Cor. 6:14-18). The conversations with a lost person cannot be the same. The Christian should make their focus of a meeting to be a testimony and even to witness to the individual concerning their eternal fate. Two lost people have the potential of willful sin that could put a wedge between them, and the fellowship is not the same. Two believers, though, should enjoy being around one another.

The bond we have ought not to be separated unless it is for that one specific person being called of God to another area. They will have fellowship in that area as well. If you had fellowship with one for a long time and they have been called to Glory, you'll see them again! What a blessing that both of you know the Lord and you'll go to Heaven to see him/her again and have an eternity of sweet fellowship in the *presence* of the Saviour! Amen!

Only Christians can truly enjoy this privilege of being with one another. Two lost people can't have the same relationship because the amount of sin can cause a wedge between them, resulting in breakups or potentially something even worse. A believer and a non-believer can't have the same relationship because the believer needs to realize the other has their eternal destination at stake. Only two believers, right with the Lord and each other, can truly enjoy being in one another's presence, both when just those gathering together or as a local NT church.

13. Passing It On... "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren." (v. 27) As we wind down this tremendous study to the local church concerning our Christian walks, let's remind ourselves that this may have been Paul's first letter to any church or pastor, so these verse may have taken on a different context than if they'd been written later. These were all important to Thessalonica, and should be equally important to us today as 21st century Christians. Here in v. 27 we see Paul wanting them to share this with all the holy brethren. This makes one thing very clear to me and it should be for all of us: we must pass it on...

While preservation can also be seen here in the countless copies of this letter, among others, being made so it can be passed to other churches and houses, preservation was already alluded to in section five. Paul held them responsible to share God's Word with the other Christians.

Whoever delivered Paul's letters probably stayed just a very short time and then went on back to Paul, wherever he was. There was more than likely one church or house wherein Christians were gathering. There was more than one assembly covering all of Galatia, so Paul penned one epistle with the intent that those receiving it first would share it.

This is a phenomenal challenge for us today. Are we sharing God's Word, both with Christians and with the lost? Could we be doing more? The answer to both of these questions ought to be yes. We should share God's Word with other Christians for encouragement, enlightenment, or exhortation: but perhaps for challenging them to grow and yourself to grow as well. As Christians learn more, they then should share with the younger or newly saved believers. Paul told Timothy: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). Find the faithful in your church, pastor, and challenge them to share God's Word with new believers. Help them grow, so they can do great things for God.

Yet more so do we see that we need to pass God's Word unto the lost. Each individual has a soul that will spend eternity in one place: Heaven or Hell. They cannot pass from one to the other, nor can it be changed once they pass away here on earth. If a lost person doesn't have God's Word, how will they know that they are a sinner deserving of Hell but yet Christ died for them? Don't leave it up to their conscience or Creation for them to see their need of a Saviour (even though they are without excuse for not seeing and knowing God through evidence of these two factors, cf. Rom. 1:20). Share God's Word with them! Crosby wrote: "Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently, tell the poor wanderer a Saviour has died. Rescue the perishing, care for the dying, Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save."

This is also what Peter meant when he said, "... be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (I Pet. 3:15) Leave tracts at the gym, restaurant, mall bench, etc. Share Christ with your co-workers. Pass on God's Word, pray, and maybe we'll see people come to Christ. Sharing God's Word with other Christians brings more fruit.

14. Promise. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." (v. 28) Paul has just one more aspect for Thessalonica and for us as he is ready to sign off on what God had for him as far as this first letter to these believers was concerned, and it is this promise: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

Grace is a tremendous aspect of the Christian life, and it is a precious promise Paul leaves Thessalonica with. This is a prayer he ended a lot of his epistles with, He told Rome this in 16:24. Corinth was told this in their first epistle (16:23) and in their second (13:14) as well. The churches of Galatia received this promise of grace in 6:18. In 6:24 of Ephesians those Christians were told if they loved the Lord in sincerity, His grace would be with them. Philippi was bestowed the same grace in 4:23. Colossae was told: "Grace be with you" (4:18). Thessalonica received their second epistle from Paul with the same ending (3:18). Timothy also received this promise from God through Paul twice: I Tim. 6:21 and II Tim. 4:22. Titus was given the promise of grace in 3:15. Philemon accepted Onesimus and this grace in v. 25. The Hebrews were also benefactors of this grace in 13:25. No other NT writer closed their epistles with this. This was like Paul's personal insignia on each of these

sacred writings to God's people.

As we have heard it before, grace really could be an acrostic of God's Riches at Christ's Expense. His grace really is only possible via Christ's brutal death on Calvary. Calvary covers it all, and that truly is grace that is greater than all our sin. It is by grace through faith that we are saved (Eph. 2:8). Works cannot save us. The writer penned: "Mercy there was great and grace was free. Pardon there was multiplied to me. There my burdened soul found liberty, At Calvary."

The promise of grace was such a huge aspect of Paul's life, for God showed him unmerited grace when he was struck and blinded on the Damascus Road. Nobody deserves a great life. We could all use a little more grace, and so we also could and should show a little more grace in our lives. As Paul told Colossae regarding their conduct: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (4:6).

The Lord Jesus Christ's grace was evident throughout His life and most evidently shown in His willingness and necessity to go to Calvary to die. Let us take this promise of grace, couple it with the other thirteen aspects we have covered, and apply them in such a way so that we can honor Him just as others, including Paul, did in their time, and may God get all the honor, glory, and praise.