

1. Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Introductory Questions:

After responding to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and becoming a Christian, we need encouragement. But it's not just young Christians – every Christian needs encouragement. Why? [Discuss]

What does it mean to encourage? (cf. the example of Barnabas in Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-27; 13:42-43) Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement”, used his means to support the poor, he helped the Jerusalem leaders to receive Paul, and constantly went about with Paul strengthening and encouraging believers. To encourage means to help others, and to inspire hope, courage, and confidence.

In our society that is so busy and self-centred, encouragement is lacking. How much encouragement do you receive? How much encouragement do you give? How could you be a better encourager like Barnabas? [Discuss]

In the letter of 1 Thessalonians we see the apostle Paul encouraging the young believers at Thessalonica. Read Acts 17:1-10, 13. Why did these new Christians especially need encouragement? The church was formed at Thessalonica in the midst of severe persecution. The Jews in Thessalonica were particularly hostile to Paul's message that Jesus is the Christ. These new Christians desperately needed encouragement in the light of the difficult ordeal they faced living for Christ (1 Thess 3:1-3)

We shall learn from the apostle Paul what it looks like to encourage fellow believers. Consider 1 Thess 2:7 and 2:10-12 as an example. Who does Paul liken himself to in these verses? He likens himself to a mother and father, tenderly caring and encouraging their children.

Background:

- The letter of 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul (1 Thess 1:1), and probably from Corinth.
- It is believed to be the first letter Paul wrote that found its way into the New Testament (somewhere around 50-51 AD).
- Thessalonica was a large and populous city. It was the capital of one of the four Roman districts of Macedonia (a main Roman province). Today it still exists, and it is the second largest city of Greece.
- Paul brought the Gospel to Thessalonica during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). He could not spend much time with them though (perhaps three weeks only), due to persecution.
- The letter of Thessalonians seeks to encourage the believers at Thessalonica to persevere as they go through trials, to encourage them to excel in their Christian lives, and to urge them to cling to their hope and the return of Christ.
- It does not contain lots of doctrine, such as the letters of Ephesians or Romans, but it has a lot on practical Christian living and encouraging words— it's a great book for discipleship.

Read 1 Thess 1:1 – 5:28

As a group, read the entire letter of 1 Thessalonians (just 89 verses).

What's some of the key things Paul declares?

What are some key verses?

Consider 1 Thess 1:8-10; 4:9-11; 4:16-18; 5:9-11

A Message For Us

The letter of 1 Thessalonians is very relevant for us. In a society where there is growing opposition to Christianity, the reduction of moral standards, and a bent to living for the here and now, 1 Thessalonians encourages us to persevere through the opposition, to live holy lives, and to live for our hope as we anticipate Christ's glorious return.

Summary: We need to be encouraged to excel at holy living and to live in the light of Christ's return.

2. Encouraged by Genuine Faith: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Review: *What is the main purpose of the letter of 1 Thessalonians? (1 Thess 3:2-3, 3:11-13; 5:9-11)*

To encourage believers as they go through the testing of their faith, to encourage them to be holy in the midst of immorality, and to encourage them to look to their hope (and not just look at the here and now).

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 1:1-10 (we will be considering vv.1-5a)

Discuss: *Before we look at our text, how do you know that you are a genuine Christian? (cf. Matt 7:15-23)*

We can tell who is a genuine Christian by the fruit they bear. We shall see this with the Thessalonians.

What good fruit shows that we are a genuine Christian? [Discuss]

Considering the Text:

What is meant by the church being "in" God? (1 Thess 1:1)

The word "in" describes the relationship between us and God. We are not just known to God. We are "in" God through faith in Christ; ie, we are part of God, protected by God, preserved by God, and precious to God; a place of greatest blessing. Like God is in us (John 14:23), we are in God.

What is significant about both God and Jesus being mentioned in relation to the church?

As the church, we relate to both God and Jesus. God is our loving heavenly Father, and Jesus is our Saviour and God's king for us (ie, the Christ). This relationship continues in eternity (cf. Rev 7:15-17).

What should the words "grace and peace to you" in 1 Thess 1:1 mean for a Christian?

The word "grace" should make us conscious of how we are saved by God's grace (Eph 2:8-9), and that God continues to deal with us in His grace. The word "peace" should make us conscious of how we have peace with God and peace in our lives through what Christ has done for us (cf. Rom 5:1; Col 1:19-20).

In 1 Thess 1:2 Paul writes in the midst of persecution "we always thank God". In 1 Thess 5:18 he writes "give thanks in all circumstances". What enables us to "give thanks" in difficult circumstances? We give thanks when, like Paul, we see God's people being fruitful as they follow Jesus. We are also enabled to "give thanks", despite the circumstances, because of our God's great character and work.

Paul thanks God specifically for the work, labour and endurance of the Thessalonians. What enabled them to bear these righteous fruits? (1 Thess 1:3)

It was their faith that enabled them to work; ie, to do good works (cf. James 2:14-18). It was their love that enabled them to labour; ie, the Greek word for "labour" means "exhaustive physical and mental toil". It was their hope that enabled them to endure or persevere (cf. Heb 10:32-36).

How can we tell, then, if a person has genuine faith in Christ, love for Christ, and hope in Christ?

Like for the Thessalonians, we can tell when we see the fruit of faith, love and hope; faith produces good works, love produces a labour of love, and hope produces endurance.

NB: The key and essential Christian attributes of faith, hope and love are mentioned in 1 Cor 13:13.

Paul was convinced that the Thessalonians were genuine Christians. Why? (1 Thess 1:4-5a)

Not only did they bear the fruit of faith, love and hope, but the work of the Holy Spirit was evident in them.

What is evident if the Spirit is at work when the Gospel is preached? (1 Thess 1:5a; John 16:7-8)

The Holy Spirit brings deep and lasting conviction in regard to our sin against God, our lack of righteousness, and our danger of judgment. This is all needed before we can truly embrace Christ by faith.

What else does God the Holy Spirit do when He is at work? (cf. 2 Cor 4:6; John 6:44; Titus 3:4-6)

He softens hardened hearts, opens blind eyes, draws us to Jesus, and regenerates and renews us. We cannot become a genuine Christian without His powerful and supernatural work in us (cf. Matt 19:25-26).

What important implication comes from 1 Thess 1:5a as we go about sharing the Gospel of Jesus?

As we share the gospel, it's not all about sharing "right words". No matter how perfectly we share, and how brilliant our logic is, or even if we share the gospel with deep emotion and conviction, at the end of the day, we need God's Spirit to bring life to the spiritually dead (cf. Eph 2:1; also 1 Cor 3:7).

REFLECT: *Are you encouraged that you have a genuine faith because there is the evidence of faith, love and hope in your life, and the evidence of the work of God's Spirit in your life?*

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 1:5a "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction."

Summary: **Encouragement to know we are saved is based on the evidence in our life of faith, love, and hope, as well as the evidence of the work of God's Holy Spirit.**

3. Encouraged by Genuine Believers: 1 Thessalonians 1:5b-10

Review: *What assured Paul that the Thessalonians were genuine Christians? (1 Thess 1:3-5a)*

The conviction and power of the Holy Spirit when the Gospel was preached, and the fruit they bore from faith, love, and hope; namely, the works of faith, the labour of love, and the endurance of hope.

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 1:5a

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 1:1-10 (we will be considering vv.5b-10)

Discuss: *Before we look at our text, how should we be living as Christians? (Matt 5:14-16; Phil 2:14-15)*

We should be shining Christ's light in a spiritually dark world [Discuss]

Considering the Text:

Besides the Gospel coming to the Thessalonians with the power of the Holy Spirit, what also helped the Thessalonians turn to Jesus and trust in Him? (1 Thess 1:5b)

Paul and his fellow workers bore witness to the reality of Jesus through their lives. They did not live as charlatans. Instead, their lives commended the Gospel of Jesus to others.

In the book of Acts, many are won to Christ through the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 2:36-41). But it also appears that many were also being won by something else. What was that? (cf. Acts 2:42-47)

The changed lives of believers, helped others believe too; such as their love and care for the poor.

REFLECT: *In your own conversion, how were you won to Christ? Was it just through the knowledge of the Word, or was it also by being impressed with the life of genuine believers? What does this teach us?*

Paul didn't just live his life to commend the Gospel to them. What also did it do? (1 Thess 1:6)

Paul's life helped other believers know how we ought to live and conduct ourselves. It was a life that others could imitate, and that would lead to a life pleasing to Christ.

REFLECT: *In 1 Cor 11:1 Paul urges the Corinthians to follow/imitate him. Why could he say that? [Because he followed Christ] Are you able to say to others "Follow me as I follow Christ"? [Discuss]*

In 1 Thess 1:6b, we learn the Thessalonians received the Gospel in much tribulation (remember that there was intense persecution there – Acts 17:4-9). Yet, what did they also experience? Why?

They experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 14:17, 15:13). The joy of the Holy Spirit is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). We experience His joy as we yield to Christ, and then the Spirit affirms to us how we are forgiven of sins, released from Satan, right with God, and have life.

REFLECT: *Discuss from this passage how the Spirit both convicts (1:5), and gives joy (1:6). [The Spirit's convicting work concerning sin is painful, but when we yield, there is great joy – cf. Psalm 32:3-5]*

Paul tells us in 1 Thess 1:7 that the Thessalonian Christians became an example to other believers throughout the Roman Empire. In what way were they an example to others? (1 Thess 1:7-10)

They were an example in their faith toward God (1:8); in their repentance by turning from idols to God (1:9); in their hope of Jesus rescuing them from wrath (1:10). They were also an example in their work of love, their labour of love and their endurance of hope (1:3). Consider: Are you a good example?

REFLECT: *There is nothing more powerful as a witness for Christ than a transformed life. [Discuss]*

The Thessalonians repented of their sins. How do we know that? How important is that?

They repented by turning from idols to serve the true and living God. Repentance is so important – it is essential for salvation. It is the all-important right response after we hear the Gospel (Mark 1:14-15).

REFLECT: *Idols continue to surround us, even if they are not statues. What idols do we need to repent of?*

What great description do we have of our God in contrast to idols? (1 Thess 1:9; cf. also Isa 46:5-7)

Our God is living– He hears and sees and moves. Our God is true – the only true God. In contrast, idols are dead and deceiving – they cannot help us.

How can we be sure that Jesus is coming back one day from heaven? (1 Thess 1:10)

It is as simple as this – He rose from the dead (cf. Acts 1:9-11).

What great truth should we cherish in regard to what Christ does for us? (1 Thess 1:10)

He rescues us from the coming wrath – from what we deserve because of our sin. We are rescued from judgment and condemnation, and from an eternity in the lake of fire (hell). Praise God!

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 1:9b-10 "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead; Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

Summary: Be an encouragement to others by being a good example as a follower of Christ.

4. Encouraged by Paul to Evangelise and Disciple: 1 Thess 2:1-12

Review: *The Thessalonian showed a right response to the Gospel. What was it? (1 Thess 1:9-10)*

They repented by turning from idols to God. They also lived their lives in the light of Christ's return.

In 1 Thess 1:10 we have a key phrase that captures the great mission of Christ. What is it?

Jesus came to rescue us from the coming wrath; from God's judgment and eternal condemnation (hell).

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 1:9b-10

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 2:1-12

Discuss: *Before we look at our text, consider the task we have all been given of sharing the gospel with others (what we call evangelism). Do you love doing it? Why or why not?*

NB: In this study, we shall see Paul's passion and perseverance in evangelising and discipling.

Considering the Text:

In 1 Thess 2:1 Paul writes that his visit was not a failure (or in vain). What does he mean?

It was not a failure because the Gospel was declared despite the opposition, and non-Christians were saved and discipled. NB: When God's word is declared it never is in vain (cf. Isa 55:10-11).

In what way could Paul's visit to Thessalonica been a failure?

It would not have been a failure if no one had responded to the Gospel, for it's not the results that count. However, it would have been a failure if Paul hadn't taken the time to preach the Gospel and disciple.

It would have been easy for Paul to not have preached the Gospel. Why? (1 Thess 2:2)

Paul had endured great opposition in Philippi, before he came to Thessalonica, and when he got to Thessalonica he then experienced severe persecution. He so easily could have given up and gone home.

What enabled Paul to preach the Gospel at Thessalonica, despite the opposition? (1 Thess 2:2)

Paul had boldness from God to "dare to tell the Gospel" (cf. 2 Cor 12:9).

REFLECT: *Do you suffer from boldness to share the Gospel? Why? What can you do? (cf. Acts 4:31)*

What else do we learn from Paul about the right way to go about evangelism? (1 Thess 2:3-6,9)

We are to speak with right motive; ie, not for self-glory or gain. We are to please God, and not ourselves or others. We are also to preach truthfully – no with trickery or flattery in an attempt to get results. Like Paul, we have been entrusted with the Gospel, and it's the Gospel we are to preach truthfully and faithfully.

REFLECT: *Discuss what enables us to preach the Gospel with right motive and to preach it truthfully? (When we have a high view of Christ, a loving heart for the lost, and confidence in the Gospel to save)*

What do we learn from Paul in 1 Thess 2:7-8 about how we should be toward others as we share the Gospel with them and disciple them?

We should be gentle, caring and loving. We are to be gentle and respectful as we share the Gospel with unbelievers (1 Peter 3:15), even loving our enemies (Matt 5:44); and for those who do become Christians, we are to especially be gentle and loving – like a nursing mother nurturing her children.

REFLECT: *How does gentleness and care help with evangelism?*

Paul didn't just share the Gospel. What else did he share? What does this mean? (1 Thess 2:8)

He shared his life with them. He lived with them and experienced persecution and suffering with them. He worked hard and helped support them – even with his own means. He didn't just fly in and fly out.

Because Paul shared his life with them, what else did the Thessalonians get from Paul? (2:10)

They saw what it looks like to follow Jesus Christ; ie, to live a holy, righteous and blameless life.

REFLECT: *What's the danger of just sharing the Gospel with people, and not living our lives before them? (They will only hear of Christ, and not see Christ)*

In 1 Thess 2:7 Paul likens himself to a mother. What does he liken himself to in 2:11? Why?

He likens himself to a father. This is because Paul dealt with these new believers like a father deals with his children – he sought to train them in the right way; the way of Christ.

In 1 Thess 2:11-12 we have a great example of what discipleship looks like. What do we learn?

Like a loving father, we are to encourage, comfort and urge new believers to live worthy lives for God's glory. This is done by giving them Christ's teaching (Matt 28:20), and living this life out before them.

REFLECT: *Often we centre on evangelism, but what happens if we neglect discipleship?*

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 2:4a "speak as men and women approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel".

Summary: Let us encourage one another to evangelise well and to disciple new believers.

5. Encouraging Words Despite Opposition: 1 Thess 2:13-20

Review: *Paul shows us in 1 Thess 2:1-12 the right way to evangelise and disciple. What is it?*

We are to be bold, preaching truthfully from right motives, and with gentleness, care and love.

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 2:4a

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 2:13-20

Discuss: *Read John 15:18-19 & 2 Tim 3:12. What will Christians experience? How do you cope with this?*

NB: In this study, Paul encourages the Thessalonians knowing that he and they experienced opposition.

Considering the Text:

Earlier in 1 Thess 1:5 we read of how the gospel came to the Thessalonians not simply with words, but also with power and conviction. What else do we learn in 1 Thess 2:13?

The Thessalonians received the Gospel not just as the word of men, but as the word of God; ie, they did not hear Paul's words as being just his own thoughts and ideas, but the words that have come from God.

When we read the Bible, how should we take in the words we read? (cf. 2 Tim 3:16)

As we read the Bible, we should take in its words as being inspired of God. Although God wrote through men, the words they wrote are from Him. As a result, they are true and reliable, as well as powerful.

What was God's word doing in the Thessalonians? (2:13b) What is meant by this? (cf. Heb 4:12)

The word of God was at work in them. God's word is dynamic. It is living and active, bringing light and revelation, as well as conviction and challenge, and it brings forth a changed life and righteous fruit.

What was one of the results of the Thessalonians having God's word work in them? (1 Thess 2:14a)

They became imitators of other churches of God in Christ Jesus, who had also heard and received the Gospel as the word of God. Indeed, they were imitators of the churches in Judea, where the Gospel was first preached, for the Word of God is the same for all people, and it does not change over time.

REFLECT: *In what way should every church be the same as each other? In what way will they be different?*

What else was similar between the Thessalonians and the churches in Judea? (1 Thess 2:14b)

They both experienced persecution, and particularly from Jews who were hostile to the Gospel.

Paul was a fellow Jew, and longed to see them saved (Rom 9:1-5). But he was also conscious that their rejection of the Gospel caused them to be an enemy to Christ's church. How does he describe them?

The Jews killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove out the Christians from Jerusalem and Judea. They were opposed to the Gospel being declared to fellow Jews, as well as to the Gentiles. Sadly, they displeased God and were under God's wrath.

REFLECT: *Not only are Jews who reject Christ under God's wrath, but who else is according to John 3:36? How do you rationalise John 3:16 (God's love) with John 3:36 (God's wrath)?*

The non-believing Jews were hindering the Gentiles from being saved. But who is really behind this?

We need to realise that our battle is not with flesh and blood, but against Satan (Eph 6:12). His chief goal is to stop people hearing the Gospel and seeing Christ (2 Cor 4:4). He's also out to harm God's church (Rev 12:17) in order to make our witness null and void.

Paul experienced persecution at Thessalonica. Yet, what did he long to do? Why? (1 Thess 2:17)

He longed to see them in order to be with them and encourage them. He really felt for them.

Paul longed to see the Thessalonians. Who stopped him? Why? (1 Thess 2:17-18)

Satan stopped him. He did not want Paul encouraging and discipling the Thessalonians, for he knew this would make them grow strong in Christ. Satan is always opposed to evangelism and discipleship.

What do we learn about Paul's heart for the Thessalonians from 2 Thess 2:19-20?

One of Paul's joys and glories was the Thessalonian Christians. He longed for that day when he would stand with them before the Lord's presence.

Though Paul couldn't see the Thessalonians, what would 2 Thess 2:13-20 have done for them?

The words Paul wrote would have really encouraged them. This is what we need when we face testings.

REFLECT: *How well do we encourage each other? How could we better encourage? (cf. Eph 4:29)*

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 2:13 "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. "

Summary: Let us encourage one another with good words and a loving heart.

6. Encouraged to Love and be Strong: 1 Thess 3:1-13

Review: *How did the Thessalonians receive Paul's words, and what did it do in them? (1 Thess 2:13-14a)*
They received Paul's words as the word of God, and this word worked in them (Heb 4:12), and made them imitators of other churches of God in Christ Jesus who had received God's Word.

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 2:13

Discuss: *Read Phil 1:29-30 & Rom 8:22-25. What have we been granted? How should we view this?*

NB: In this study, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to not be unsettled by the trials that come from trusting in Christ, but he encourages them to grow in love and to be strengthened in the faith.

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 3:1-13

Considering the Text:

Paul longed to see the Thessalonians himself, but he was prevented (1 Thess 2:17-18). So he sent his fellow worker Timothy instead. What did he specifically send Timothy to do? (1 Thess 3:1-3)

Timothy was sent to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonian Christians in their faith, so that they would not become unsettled from the trials and persecutions that they were enduring for Christ's sake.

REFLECT: These two words, "strengthen" and "encourage", should characterise the way we minister to each other. In what ways can we do this better? In what ways do we undo this work?

Why should the Thessalonians not have been unsettled by the trials they faced? (1 Thess 3:4)

Paul told them, while he was still with them, that they would be persecuted as they trusted in and followed Jesus. As a result, they shouldn't have been surprised by what they faced (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-13).

REFLECT: What does v.4 imply in regard to what Paul taught? [Paul didn't just share the basic Gospel truths with the Thessalonians, but he also discipled them by telling them the trials we will face]

What was Paul fearful of, and which caused him to send Timothy despite the danger? (1 Thess 3:5)

He was afraid that the severe persecutions the Thessalonians were facing might be used by Satan to cause them to turn away from following Christ. Paul was concerned about their faith (their hold) on Christ.

How is Satan described in 1 Thess 3:5? What do we need to be aware of in our own life?

Satan is called "the tempter". He will not only tempt us into sin, but he will also tempt us to turn from the faith, convincing us that it is not worth it. This is what Satan tried to do in Job's case (Job 1:8-11).

REFLECT: What is the key to not "throwing in" our faith when we go through trials and persecutions? (cf. Mark 4:5, 16-17) [We need to grow in the word and be grounded in it]

What was Paul overjoyed to hear when Timothy returned? Why? (1 Thess 3:6-9)

Paul was overjoyed to hear of their faith and love. They were standing firm in their faith in Christ, and they were showing the true fruit of genuine faith by their love for each other. As a result, Paul knew that Satan hadn't turned them away from Christ, and that they were actually doing well spiritually.

Paul was earnestly praying to see them again. Why? (1 Thess 3:10)

Paul wanted to see them because he loved them, and he wanted to supply what was lacking in their faith.

What does Paul mean by "supply what is lacking in your faith"?

Paul simply wanted to continue to teach them more about Christ and His ways. Unless we grasp the whole counsel of God, our understanding of Christ and our response to Him will be lacking. The point of true discipleship is to "supply what is lacking in your faith" by teaching the Word.

REFLECT: What is lacking in your faith? Do you grasp God's will for you? Do you have right doctrine?

In 1 Thess 3:12, what does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to do?

He encourages them to increase their love for each other and others. We should know a growing love for each other, and even for those who aren't Christians (we are even to love our enemies - Matt 5:44). This comes from the Lord; from the work of the Holy Spirit bearing the fruit of love in us (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22).

In 1 Thess 3:13, what is Paul's second desire for the Thessalonians?

He wants the Lord to strengthen their hearts; ie, to be strong in faith and to never lose their hold on Christ.

Why is this so important? (1 Thess 3:13)

By faith in Christ we alone can stand blameless and holy before God when the Lord Jesus returns.

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 3:13 "May the Lord strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

Summary: Let us encourage one another to love each other and to be strong in our faith in Christ.

7. Encouraged to be Holy: 1 Thess 4:1-12

Review: *What should we encourage each other to do? (1 Thess 3:1-2, 11-13)*

We should encourage one another to love each other and to be strong in our faith in Christ Jesus.

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 3:13

Discuss: *We live in a society that abounds in sexual immorality and self-centredness (cf. also 2 Tim 3:1-4). Discuss the challenge of keeping yourself unpolluted (James 1:27) as we live in this fallen world.*

NB: In this study, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to be holy.

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 4:1-12

Considering the Text:

In the brief time Paul was at Thessalonica, he didn't just preach the core Gospel truths. As part of discipleship, what else did he teach them before he left them due to persecution? (1 Thess 4:1-2)

He taught them how to live a God-pleasing life; ie, a life that is for God's pleasure rather than our pleasure.

What does Paul mean by instructing the Thessalonians "by the authority of the Lord Jesus"?

Paul was teaching them according to Matt 28:20. He was passing on Christ's teaching; not his own teachings or ideas. This is true discipleship – teaching others the commands of Christ our King.

Although Paul knew that they were living to please God, what does he urge them to do? Why?

He urges them to please God more and more. We will never be perfect, and there will always be areas of our life that we need to work on, and there will always be greater ways that we can live to please God.

Many wrestle in seeking to know God's will. According to 1 Thess 4:3, what is God's will?

God's will for a Christian is no mystery. It is to be holy or sanctified, or as it says in Eph 1:4, "to be holy and blameless". There are many things we might wonder about in regard to God's will for us (eg, what job we should have, whether we should marry, etc), but God's primary will for us is to be holy.

REFLECT: *How should we view holiness in relation to salvation? (cf. Eph 2:8-10; Heb 12:14)*

[We are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, but we show that we are saved by being holy]

Holiness covers all our life. What particular area does Paul especially target? Why? (1 Thess 4:3)

He targets sexual immorality. It's a main area where humans rebel against God due to the strong sexual desires that are within. Christians need to be aware of this area of temptation.

What is really behind the sin of sexual immorality? (1 Thess 4:5)

Instead of there being the motive of love, there is passionate sinful lust and desire. Such lust is evil.

What helpful instructions does Paul give to us in relation to being holy sexually? (1 Thess 4:4-5)

Paul teaches us to learn to control our own body sexually. We have the help of the Spirit in this, who gives self-control (Gal 5:23). We are urged to keep "the marriage bed pure" (Heb 13:4).

Consider 1 Cor 6:18-20. What do we learn from this passage?

We are to flee sexual immorality. To "entertain" this sin will lead to us falling into sin. We also need to remember that our body is no longer our own. We belong to the Lord and He lives in us by His Spirit.

What do you think Paul means by 1 Thess 4:6a, in the context of sexual immorality?

The sexual sin of adultery affects many others. We are not to wrong another believer by making sexual advances toward their spouse, let alone commit adultery.

Consider 1 Thess 4:6-8. What strong warnings does Paul give us in relation to sexual immorality?

The Lord, who is gracious, will bring punishment and discipline to us if we sin in this area. To reject Christ's teaching on sexual purity is to reject and resist the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Thess 4:9-10, Paul turns from instructions on sexual immorality, which is about not allowing evil desires to rule our heart, to teach us about what should rule our heart. What is that?

We should love each other. We are to love other believers in Christ, and indeed, we are to love every person on the face of the earth (cf. Matt 5:44). If we truly love each other, then we will not sin against another, including in the area of sexual immorality.

Through loving others, what are we encouraged to do in 1 Thess 4:11-12? Why?

We are not to be a loud-mouth, busy-body, but be quiet. We are not to be a burden to others, but to work hard and seek to be independent. In this way, non-believers will respect us and our faith in Christ.

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 4:11 "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you."

Summary: Let us encourage one another to live a life pleasing to the Lord – to be holy.

8. Encouraged by Hope – the Lord's Return: 1 Thess 4:13-18

Review: *As we seek to live a holy life, what are we to avoid and what are we to do? (1 Thess 4:1-12)*

We are not to burn with lust and commit sexual immorality, but rather love each other with a pure heart.

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 4:11

Discuss: *Why do you think the New Testament has a lot of teaching on Christ's return?* [To prepare us for tribulation, to make sure we are ready for Christ's return, and to give us hope in difficult times]

NB: In this study, Paul encourages us with hope regarding our victory over death at Christ's return.

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 4:13-18

Considering the Text:

When a Christian dies, we grieve, but what do we have to help comfort us? (1 Thess 4:13-14)

We have hope; a sure and certain hope. We believe that those who have died in Christ have gone to be with Christ (2 Cor 5:6-8) and God the Father, and that they will come with Christ when He returns.

REFLECT: *Consider when a non-Christian dies. What fills the heart of those who grieve for them? Why?*

Paul often uses the metaphor of "sleep" to describe the Christian's death. Why? (1 Thess 4:13)

Paul uses the word "sleep", not because we are in a state of "soul sleep" in heaven when we die. Indeed, we are very much with it, as is made clear in Rev 6:9-10 concerning the martyrs. However, our body is in a state of "sleep", in the sense that it is resting and is waiting to be awakened when Christ returns.

What is the basis of our hope that Christians who have died will return with Christ? (1 Thess 4:14)

Our hope is completely based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because He died for our sins and rose from the dead, the moment we die, we go home to be with the Lord, and then we shall come back with Him at His return (cf. John 11:25-26 and John 14:19).

In this passage we learn some key truths about Christ's return. What are they? (1 Thess 4:16)

The Lord Jesus shall return spectacularly from heaven with power and authority. Even the highest angel, the archangel, will declare to the whole world Christ's coming.

There is quite an emphasis that Jesus will return from the heavens in the New Testament (Acts 1:9-11; Matt 24:30). What's the key point being made from this?

Jesus will not rise from the earth. The anti-Christ will, and all false Christs will, but the true Christ will come a second time on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; for He presently is in heaven.

What is the significance of the trumpet call of God in 1 Thess 4:16? (cf. Matt 24:30-31)

It will signify the time for judgment. As a result, those who aren't Christians will mourn, for Christ has come to judge the world in righteousness. His resurrection signalled that this would be so (Acts 17:30-31).

But besides coming to judge the world in righteousness, what will the Lord Jesus do at His return (for us, these are words of hope)? (1 Thess 4:15-17)

He will bring back those who died and were with Him in glory, and He will cause their dead bodies to rise. Thus their eternal soul will be clothed with a new body. Also, we who are alive on earth when Christ returns will be lifted up to Christ, and be given a new body as we ascend (1 Cor 15:51-53).

In 1 Cor 15:54-57 we have some triumphant words concerning what? Why?

We have triumphant words in relation to victory over our great enemy – death. At His return, Christ will defeat death for us. Just as Christ conquered the grave, we will also conquer it through Him by His power.

How should we use these words of hope? (1 Thess 4:18)

We should encourage one another with these words of hope. When we face death, when a fellow believer is terminally ill, or just in general, we should encourage and comfort each other with our glorious hope.

REFLECT: *Why do we, especially as Christians in the western world, not talk a lot about our hope? What does this indicate?* [We are so often fixated on the here and now; it shows that we think about and live more for this life, then what is to come – consider the challenge in 2 Cor 5:6-7]

What else should our hope do for us? (cf. 1 Cor 15:59)

Besides encouraging us, it ought to spur us on to be faithful in following the Lord and serving Him with all our might, for our labour in the Lord is not in vain – not in the light of our glorious hope.

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 4:16 "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."

Summary: Let us encourage one another in the light of Christ's return – we have a glorious hope.

9. Encouraged to Build Each Other Up in Our Hope: 1 Thess 5:1-11

Review: *In 1 Thess 4:13-18 we have words of great hope to encourage us. What are they?*

If we are in Christ, when we die, we go home to be with the Lord, and we will come with Him at His return. We will also receive new bodies at Christ's return; death shall be fully defeated (1 Cor 15:54-57).

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 4:16

Discuss: *For centuries people have sought to predict when Christ shall return. What do we learn from Matt 24:32-36 about this? [We are not to predict when Jesus shall return, but instead, we ought to know when the time is near through the observation of signs that Jesus and His apostles have given us]*

What is surprising about Matt 24:36? [Not even Jesus knows when He shall return – only the Father]

NB: In this study, Paul encourages the Thessalonians not to predict Christ's return, but to live well in anticipation of His coming and to encourage and build each other up (ie, fellow believers) in our hope.

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 5:1-11

Considering the Text:

What is meant by "the Lord will come like a thief in the night"? (1 Thess 5:1-2; Matt 24:42-44)

The Lord Jesus shall return unexpectedly, just as a thief breaks into a house at an unexpected time. He will return when people are not expecting him. Thus, the need to be alert and ready (Matt 24:42).

Why will Jesus return be unexpected? (1 Thess 5:3)

It will be unexpected for there will be "peace and safety" on the earth; in other words, it won't be at a time of great upheaval, where people are beside themselves.

REFLECT: *As Christians, we have associated Christ's return with great upheaval, rather than with a time of peace. Why is that? [We have misread texts like Matt 24:1-28 to think that the "tribulation" will only happen immediately before Christ's return, rather than it being right through this whole time]*

What warning is given in 1 Thess 5:3b in regard to Christ's return?

Jesus shall bring sudden destruction to those who remain on the earth when He comes again (ie, judgment to non-believers). There will be no salvation and no escape. As a pregnant woman cannot put-off her labour pains once they begin, so once Christ returns, judgment and destruction will immediately come.

Although Christ will return "like a thief", how should His coming be for believers? (1 Thess 5:4)

Christ's return should not take us by surprise, for by God's Spirit we have been enabled to see and understand not only who Christ is, but also about His return and what will transpire before He comes.

How does Paul distinguish between believers and non-believers in 1 Thess 5:5? (cf. also John 8:12)

Christians are "sons of the light and sons of the day"; ie, we walk and live in the light of God's truth. We are unlike non-Christians who are in spiritual darkness; ie, they do not understand what is to come.

Since Christians have spiritual sight, and are not in darkness, how should we live? (1 Thess 5:6-8)

We should not be asleep; ie, unaware of the things that are going to happen, and unaware of Christ's return. We should be alert and ready for Christ's coming. We also should live self-controlled and holy lives, so that when Christ comes He may be pleased with us.

What are the three things that should summarise our life? What are their benefits? (1 Thess 5:8b)

We should walk in faith, love and hope (cf. 1 Thess 1:3; 1 Cor 13:13). Faith and love are like a breastplate, protecting our heart from following the desires of this world, and hope is like a helmet that protects our mind from dwelling on temporal things.

In 1 Thess 5:9-10, Paul mentions a great truth that is part of our hope. What is it? Why is this?

We are not destined for wrath, but for salvation, and for living with Christ. This is because Jesus has rescued us from the wrath we deserved, by paying the penalty for our sins on the cross (cf. 1 Thess 1:10)

Whether we live or die, what great truth do we enjoy if we are a Christian? (1 Thess 5:10)

We will always live with Christ, if we have truly turned to Him. If we should die, we go to live with Christ in heaven. If we should remain, we live with Christ on earth through His Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

In the light of what Christ has done for us and our glorious hope, what should we be doing? (5:11)

We should be encouraging each other and building each other up. No matter how things are, it is well with our soul. We will not suffer wrath. We will live forever with Christ in glory.

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 5:9 "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Summary: Let us encourage one another in the truth that we will not suffer wrath, but live with Christ.

10. Encouraged to Live Godly Lives: 1 Thess 5:12-22

Review: *How should we be different to non-Christians in the light of Christ's return? (1 Thess 5:1-11)*

We should be alert and ready for Christ because we have been given signs and instructions. We should be full of faith, love and hope, as well as encouraging each other as we look forward to Christ's return.

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 5:9

Discuss: *How does a Christian become spiritually inactive and asleep in this world when Christ is on His way back? [By neglecting God's truth; getting our eyes onto the temporal things of this life and pursuing them instead; by despairing of life here on earth and just longing to go to heaven]*

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 5:12-22

Considering the Text:

What is the role of Church leaders? (1 Thess 5:12-13; cf. also 1 Peter 5:1-3; 1 Tim 5:17)

Church leaders are to admonish and encourage fellow believers, they are to work hard at their God-given task. They are also to shepherd Christ's flock, be an example to them, and teach and equip them.

What attitude should we have toward a church leader? (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17)

We ought to respect them and highly regard the important work they do. We ought to obey and submit to them and live in peace with them so that they may be able to do their work with joy; and not with grief.

REFLECT: *Often leaders in a church are not respected. Why is this? What can we do to encourage respect and honour? [Leaders need to do the work of the Lord; the flock need to respect them for it]*

The emphasis to "live in peace" is frequently declared (cf. Eph 4:1-3; Heb 12:14). Why?

We will never fulfil Christ's desire for unity (John 17:20-23), unless we live in peace with each other.

Paul gives us an abbreviated list of what we should do for fellow believers when they are not living as they ought. How are the instructions given helpful for the brother/sister in trouble?

A fellow believer who is idle needs to be warned as idleness can so easily lead to sin; those who are timid need to be encouraged to be courageous, otherwise they may deny Christ or turn away from following Him; those who are weak, perhaps in health or in dealing with sin, need to be helped so that they may not become discouraged. In every case, we are to act as our "brother's (or sister's) keeper".

What key things does Paul say in regard to the attitude we should have when dealing with others?

We should be patient and kind, and we should never be revengeful, paying back evil with evil, especially if a fellow believer has sinned against us or hurt us. Instead, we are to care for and love each other.

REFLECT: *What are the attitudes all too commonly seen when a Christian sees a fellow believer in sin? [We often judge and condemn them, rather than have mercy, and pray and help them]*

In 1 Thess 5:16-22, Paul gives instructions in bullet point form. Though each may be briefly mentioned, why is it so important that we live out each command?

These commands will help us live godly lives and help us be ready for Christ's coming (cf. 1 Thess 5:6-8).

Why should we be joyful always? (1 Thess 5:16)

We should be joyful for our position in Christ can never be altered; it is well with our soul. (cf. 1 Pet 1:8-9).

We are to pray continually. What does that practically mean? (1 Thess 5:17)

It doesn't mean having a "quiet time" 24/7. It means we do not stop praying to God. We continually (ie, in different moments of the day) reflect our praise to Him or call on Him for help. It's ongoing.

What's one key reason that we can give thanks to God in all circumstances?

It is because He rules; He is in control. This enabled Job to praise God in his circumstances (Job 1:20-21).

The commands in 1 Thess 5:19-20 are linked together. What are these commands about?

We are to be careful in not quenching the Spirit, for He is our source of spiritual life ('our fire'). We can so easily do that, not just by sinning, but by not listening to God's word, including when someone speaks from the Bible a word of instruction (or a word of prophecy from the Bible).

What do the last commands in 1 Thess 5:21-22 practically mean?

We are to not be naïve but test everything – not everything is of God and there are many false teachings out there (cf. 1 John 4:1). We are also to hold onto what is good and to avoid evil – that includes being wise in keeping our distance from things that can lead us to sin.

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 5:16-18 "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Summary: Let us be encouraged to live godly lives until Christ returns or we go to be with Him.

11. Encouraged by God's Work in Us: 1 Thess 5:23-28

Review: *What should our attitude be to church leaders and to fellow believers? (1 Thess 5:12-15)*

We should respect church leaders and highly regard their work in the Lord. We should care for fellow believers, being patient and kind, and never retaliating if they hurt us. We are to keep the peace.

What commands are we to live out as we live in the light of Christ's return? (1 Thess 5:16-22)

We are to be joyful, prayerful and thankful continually. We are not to quench the Spirit by refusing to listen to Him through the Word. We are to test all things, cling to what is good, and turn from evil.

Review Memory Verse: 1 Thess 5:16-18

Discuss: Consider this statement: "*Christ has saved you. It's now up to you to live the Christian life*". If this statement is true, how does it make you feel? But is it true? Why or why not?

Bible Text: Read 1 Thess 5:12-28 (especially vv. 23-28)

Considering the Text:

After giving the Thessalonians instructions on how to live a sanctified and godly life, Paul gives them some very encouraging words in 1 Thess 5:23a. What are they?

God Himself would sanctify them; or make them holy. In other words, it's not all up to us. God will make it happen. And He hasn't delegated this to a person or an angel – but to Himself to do through His Spirit.

What do we learn from the following verses about God's work in us?

John 15:5 We actually can't do anything without the help of the Lord

Phil 1:6 God, who has begun His work in us, will complete His work in us

Phil 1:12-13 God is at work in us so that we might do His will for His good pleasure

God's desire is to sanctify us "through and through", or "entirely". What does this mean?

God wants to totally transform us so that we might be made in the image of Christ – that's holiness (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). God wants to work in every area of our life so that we are entirely holy – in thought, word, deed, and motive. What a great work this is, when we consider how corrupted we were made by the Fall.

God is described as the "God of peace" in 1 Thess 5:23. Why do you think Paul shares this?

To us who are in Christ, we are no longer under wrath, but under peace. Jesus has rescued us from the wrath we deserve (1 Thess 1:10), and we are not destined for wrath (1 Thess 5:9). Instead, we have peace with God (Rom 5:1), and He deals with us in peace – including His work of sanctification in us.

What is Paul's desire for the Thessalonians, according to the second half of 1 Thess 5:23?

Paul desires that when Christ returns, the Thessalonians would be blameless (ie, clothed with holiness) at His return, and that they would be kept holy until that time Christ returns.

REFLECT: *Is Paul teaching sinless perfection (ie, the idea that we can reach a state where we never sin and are constantly holy)? [NO! But we are to be growing in holiness and keeping short accounts with God to maintain our fellowship with Him (cf. 1 John 1:6-2:2)]*

What a promise God makes to sanctify us! And what does Paul remind us of in 1 Thess 5:24?

God is absolutely faithful and He will accomplish His promise of sanctifying us. He who called us will sanctify us, just as He also justified us, and has promised to glorify us (cf. Rom 8:28-30).

REFLECT: *What should our right response be to God's promises? [We should be so thankful for His purposes for us, and we should humble ourselves and yield to the work of His Spirit in our life]*

In 1 Thess 5:25, what does Paul request? Why?

Paul requests prayer – he needs God's people to pray for Him as he serves Christ as His apostle and evangelist. Although God "does the work" of salvation and sanctification, we need to pray, so that we, and fellow servants, may be in the very best place and state to help others through God's Spirit working in us.

Several times in his epistles Paul speaks of a "holy kiss". What does he mean by this?

In his culture, people greeted each other with a kiss. As Christians, our greeting needs to be holy and sincere.

In the very last words of this letter, what does Paul write. Why?

Paul calls on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to be with them (cf. also 1 Thess 1:1). There is no better blessing or benediction to give fellow believers. He so loved them, and He wanted Christ's grace and favour to be upon them. May we want the best for each other, and may we encourage one another.

Memory Verse: 1 Thess 5:23 "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Summary: Let us be encouraged by the truth that God is at work in us who believe in Christ.