

***“Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians –
‘How We Live Awaiting His Coming Is Most Important’”***

Introduction:

Martin Luther's letter around 1508 to a friend in ministry: [via 'Patriot Post']:

Sixteenth century Reformer Martin Luther wrote almost 500 years ago about responding to pandemics. When Luther was confronted by questions about how to respond to The Black Death Plague, he responded in words that should serve to inform our approach to the pandemic crisis our nation and the world is now facing today.

In a letter to Rev. Dr. John Hess, found in Luther's Works, Volume 43 p. 132, as “Whether one may flee from a Deadly Plague,” Luther writes:

“I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence.

If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others.

If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above.

See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash no foolhardy and does not tempt God.”

Those were Luther's words during the Plague that was sweeping over Europe at the time. May they be a blessing to us as well today.

Review:

- ***In our meeting last week, we looked at the entire of 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3. Paul's teaching there was very relevant to the times in which we live, perhaps even more so than we may have realized. But the difference is that Paul had a specific revelation given to him by Christ that trials and tribulations on the near horizon were to be expected. Such had been prophesied and he had told the believers there when he was with them that they should expect such tribulations. He had also taught them that their hope was eternal and that this life is a preparation for eternity.***

But false teachers had confused the believers after Paul had left and they were no longer resting the grace of God as Paul had taught them. Many were anxious and fearful and had come to believe that what Paul had taught them was wrong and even, perhaps, that Paul was a false apostle. When some of their fellowship had died, they were even more troubled. That brought us to our teaching last time in chapter 3 of this powerful letter, perhaps even the very first letter written in the New Testament.

- ***Trials and Tribulations are to be Expected – But Never Give Satan the Victory***

1 Thess. 3:3-5

3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

- ***Our trials today may not match what the Thessalonian believers were experiencing, but they are real nevertheless. Many lives are turned upside down today and will be for some time. The challenge for us believers is to never let Satan steal away our joy, to never surrender and therefore become unfruitful. For it is always the will of God that we be thankful.***

- ***But, Our “Sense” of Wellbeing Is Often Dependent on Others’ Wellbeing***

1 Thess. 3:6-7, 10

6 But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also [to see] you.

7 Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

...

10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

- ***The many blessings of fellowship with the brethren we care so much about is the apostle’s focus here. Their comfort was his joy:***
- ***Paul’s desire for the Thessalonians was a proper and spiritual desire. He wanted to “perfect that which is lacking” in their faith. It is not***

going beyond the text here to also point out that Paul's concern for these believers was directly related to their sadness regarding the death of some of their own. Some had gone on to be with the Lord and that was upsetting them even spiritually, not only emotionally but also spiritually. They had bought into what false teachers had been preaching to them.

This had turned their life and hope upside down. So Paul was rightly concerned. Therefore Paul wanted so much to come to them for their spiritual benefit, that he might "perfect their faith".

This should be our example too. May our desire for fellowship have such a high spiritual goal as Paul's did. Amen.

- ***However, Even Without That Personal Connection, Our Blessings Shall Abound, From Now Until Eternity***

1 Thess. 3:12-13

12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all [men], even as we [do] toward you:

13 To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

- ***Nevertheless, even absent from them, God's never ceasing work in them was sure and it would never cease. The pure doctrine of the return of the Lord was still the key, he writes here, of their spiritual wellbeing. This pure doctrine has been nearly entirely lost in the churches today since in the seeker-friendly and so often "new age" churches simply building church attendance is a primary goal and that demands a strict limit on the proper teaching of Bible doctrine. Verse by verse teaching of the scriptures is increasingly absent in the contemporary church assemblies. So, to perfect their faith he writes these words to remind them of the coming of the Lord:***

"To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

- ***Blessings unlimited await us, but the glory is all his. It is his work, not ours. Building up the brethren was so important, and the fruit of the spirit (as represented here by love) was so crucial to that work of the Lord in them. Amen.***

- ***Next time, we will continue in this chapter to that essential teaching, the pre-Tribulational return of Christ for his church.***

Our Outline Today:

- ***Paul's Example Must Now Be Applied – That We All Love One Another***
- ***Paul's Teaching Includes the Most Difficult of Issues – Even Marriage***
- ***Paul's Exhortation Toward Brotherly Love Is Fundamental – And Universal***

Our Scripture: 1 Thess. 4:1-12

I. Paul's Example Must Now Be Applied – That We All Love One Another:

- ***There have been already in this letter so many reminders of Paul's love for the saints in Thessalonica that his example before all was clear. Chapter 3 and verse 12 mentioned that and exhorted the believes to imitate Paul in their love of one another and of all, even those without the church.***

Now was the time to apply that teaching – now was the time for them to imitate Paul as he imitated Christ Jesus. That is the subject of this chapter.

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:1-2

1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort [you] by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, [so] ye would abound more and more.

2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

- ***“For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus”: It was still the order of the day that these believers were to follow Paul along with his instruction to them that was from Christ directly. His teachings therefore were not his own personal views! Abounding in that was what the Lord himself wanted.***
 - ***“... by the Lord Jesus”: Lit. “... through the [instrumentality of] the Lord Jesus.***
 - ***Generally, what Paul was teaching was provided to him by the risen and ascended Lord Jesus (see Acts 26:16). He makes it clear when he is not writing what the Lord gave him. So these words here are not “his” in a limiting sense, but the Lord’s***

own, as it were. 1 Cor. 7:40 is one place, however, where Paul was apparently not taught by the Lord but where he does believe that the Spirit of God is guiding his writing, nonetheless. But there we see a little uncertainty in his conviction. But there is no uncertainty most of the time, praise God.

- *Sometimes he uses the word “commandments” when writing of the word of Christ given to him (KJV):*

1 Cor. 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.**

1 Cor. 7:25 Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.

So, Paul knew the difference between his own opinions and the commandments of the Lord Jesus!

- *In addition, there are other places in Paul’s letters where he writes of this, some times using other words or language. For example, see 1 Cor. 2:13, 7:6, 25, 2 Cor. 2:17, 12:19, Col. 3:16, 1 Thess. 1:8, 4:15, 2 Thess. 3:1, and 1 Tim. 2:7. Col. 1:25 is so instructive in this in that there Paul writes that it was given to him to be the one to “complete” the word of God as it relates to this Dispensation of the Grace of God! Amen and amen.*
- *So Paul is here exhorting the believers and his words of exhortation are to be taken very seriously, even indeed as the very words of Christ himself as given to Paul by the Lord. This is why I do not recommend Red Letter Bibles. They imply very strongly that Paul’s words are not on the same level as Christ’s and perhaps not even inspired.*

Today, when so many are turning away from the Pauline truth, let us rather cleave to the truth of grace through Paul ever more strongly. Amen.

II. Paul's Teaching Includes the Most Difficult of Issues — Even Marriage:

- ***Today's weak and ineffective churches, irrespective of size, for size is never a measure ever of spiritual effectiveness, are failing for several reasons not the least of which is the one Paul next addresses here — worldliness and carnality. And ungodliness in the area of sexuality is often right in the middle of that failure. Many compromised pastors and teachers and blinded by a false view of the nature and purpose of the church today and many openly welcome what the apostle condemns here in 1 Thessalonians and also condemns in many of his letters.***
- ***Let's read now what he writes here concerning God's high standards for the members of the church, the very Body of Christ. He is not chastising the believers here as he certainly had the ones in Corinth, but he is setting the bar high as to the conduct God expects to see in the assemblies of believers:***

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:3-5

3 For this is the will of God, [even] your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

5 Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

- ***“The will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication”: We do not need to know ancient and pagan marriage customs to know what this is all about. The “culture” of the day was thoroughly corrupt, that is clear. Sexual activity apart from Godly marriage was the norm then much as it is today. God's standard is for an abiding and Godly marriage or celibacy — nothing else can ever please the Lord. It could not be clearer than this.***
- ***“That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sancification and honour; Not in the lust [passions] of concupiscence [strong desire], even as the Gentiles which know not God: How high a standard we find here. Because God has established marriage from the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve. Satan's greatest desire is to destroy all that God has ordained and he is working overtime to accomplish just that. The entire World System is constructed by Satan specifically to accomplish that and Satan's other goals, that he hight be worshipped rather than Almighty God.***

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:6-8

6 That no [man] go beyond and defraud his brother in [any] matter: because that the Lord [is] the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

8 He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

- ***Here we see yet another dimension of this:*** “That no [man] go beyond and defraud his brother in [any] matter”: ***This enjoins the believers (the men being addressed here but the women are included as well I am sure by implication) to live lives of holiness and honor. The focus here is clearly marriage (or betrothal, or, as we call it today, engagement).***

See also 1 Cor. 7 for even more of this teaching. There we find a related but different concept, namely, the responsibility of a father to protect his daughters regarding this issue of purity and marriage – and regarding the will of God in a very specific sense. Fathers have a very great responsibility.

- ***This short teaching is not intended to cover some of the complex issues regarding a believer’s marriage, such as, for example, with the issue of divorce and then remarriage. See 1 Corinthians and especially chapter 7 for Paul’s detailed teaching on that.***
- ***The absolute contrast between the unbelieving world and the church as the Lord God intends it is what is in focus here. He also writes of this in several other places in his letters:***

But a summarizing statement that makes clear God view on this subject for all believers to know well is this:

1 Cor. 7:2 Nevertheless, [to avoid] fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

See Eph. 5:1-3 and Gal. 5:19-21 for additional teaching on this critically important subject.

III. Paul’s Exhortation Toward Brotherly Love Is Fundamental – And Universal:

- *These exhortations found here in this letter and others underscore al of life. Brotherly love is fundamental to our living as believers...*

[READ] 1 Thess. 4:9-10

9 But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

10 And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

- “ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another”: ***So, no special methods are needed, no special enablements. No programs. No religious methods or techniques that are usually contrary to true spirituality. There is no contemporary and popular book or movie that can provide us with what the word of God can not and has not. No, none!***

Love is the first segment of the fruit of the spirit mentioned in Gal. 5:22-23. It is fruit produced in us by the Holy Spirit of God.

- “that ye increase more and more”: ***There is always a place for love in our interactions with others. Always. Sadly, much of life is NOT godly and not spiritual. Our standards are so very often much lower than the Lord’s that we live in the realm of the flesh rather than the realm of the spirit. And organized religion often stands in the way of the newness of life we all need enjoy very, very much. In especially trying times such as those we are entering into now, this will become clearer to so many who have been i***

[READ] 1 Cor. 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Conclusions / Application:

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