

# OpenTheo

## 1 Thessalonians 5



### 1 Thessalonians - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg delves into the fifth and final chapter of First Thessalonians, addressing eschatological questions about what happens to those who have died before the second coming of Christ. Gregg emphasizes the importance of living in relative security and avoiding living lifestyles that can be a threat to judgment. He emphasizes the importance of avoiding the tendency towards compromise with the worldly darkness and walking as children of light, and also underscores the value of working together for sanctification.

## Transcript

First Thessalonians, chapter 5, and we'll finish up, I imagine, in this session, this book, and of course tomorrow we'll go immediately into Second Thessalonians, and I think we should be able to finish that up in time allotted this week. Chapter 4 discussed three issues that were on Paul's mind relevant to the circumstance in Thessalonica, the first being moral purity and holiness, especially sexual purity. Then he talked about working with your own hands and how that is really what true brotherly love requires, is that you pull your own weight and you don't become dependent on others, and you work and support yourself so that you might lack nothing and walk honestly toward others.

And then he went into the subject of the second coming of Christ. Now, in the end of chapter 4, verses 13-18, he mainly discussed those aspects of the second coming of Christ which were brought up in order to bring comfort to those who had lost loved ones. That is, of course, mentioned specifically in verse 13, I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope.

Also, the discussion concludes in verse 18, wherefore comfort one another with these words. So that whole discussion is talking about the comforting aspects of the second coming of Christ in light of the fact that some of the Christian friends and loved ones have died. As I mentioned yesterday, I believe the situation was that they had expected a sooner return of Christ than actually happened and hadn't really dealt with the question of what happens if we die first.

They kind of felt, well, the Lord will come so soon, we'll all live to see it, but when some of them began to die with the passage of time, and Jesus still hadn't come, the question arose, well, what happens to these people? Have they missed it? And Paul answers, no, they haven't missed it. When the Lord comes, he will raise the dead first and then catch the rest of us up to meet him in the air. And this is intended to be comforting, and it is comforting.

Now, he continues to talk about the second coming of Christ in the beginning part of chapter 5, in verses 1 through 4 principally, and largely what he's saying in this part is that we don't really know when his coming will be. It may be that along with the question of what will happen to those who have died when he comes back, they may have also said, well, when is he coming anyway? I mean, if he didn't come as soon as they thought, they might have been wondering, when is Jesus coming? There might have been some speculation, some maybe offering some dates, some maybe saying, well, maybe he's not coming at all. And Paul needs to tell them that Jesus certainly is going to come back, but as to the timing, we absolutely don't know when he's going to come back, which agrees with what Jesus said when he was asked in the Olivet Discourse.

They had asked him what would be the sign of his coming and when should these things be, and with reference to his coming, he said, Of that day and hour knoweth no man, neither the angels of heaven, nor even the Son, but only the Father knows that. So it's very clear Paul is in agreement with Jesus in saying we don't know when he's coming, don't get too excited. Now, when we get to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, we'll find that the excitement about the assumed near coming of Christ was unabated.

They apparently were so excited about the coming of Christ that they quit their jobs and decided to just live by faith and expect his immediate coming. So Paul had to correct them in that. In 2 Thessalonians 2, he had to say, listen, it's not as soon as you think.

Some things have to happen first. But here he only gives the general truth that it is not going to come in a way that can be easily predicted or at a time that we can know in advance about. It says, But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

Now, he's been talking about the details of the coming of Christ, what would happen when it happens, but as far as the time and the seasons of the coming of Christ, he says, Now, I don't really even need to tell you this, but I'm going to remind you. I've told you before, but he says, You yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day shall overtake you as a thief. You are the children of the light. And he goes on to make some application to that.

Now, one discussion leads into the next, and so there's a transition that takes place there in verses 4 and 5. But essentially, he reminds us of what Jesus himself had said. Jesus said his coming would be as a thief in the night. In Luke 17, 24, Jesus said that.

And in Matthew 24, 43, we have it also. So Paul just uses the same words Jesus had used. The coming of the Lord will be like a thief in the night.

Now, some have misunderstood this, and have thought that this refers to a secret rapture, that sometime when no one's aware of it, Jesus is going to come snatch his church away, but that life will go on, nonetheless, for seven years through a period of great tribulation, and then the Lord will come visibly. But that the rapture of the church will be a secret, private affair. And this is one of the verses that they use as a proof text.

He will come as a thief in the night. As though he's going to sneak in quietly, take what he's going to take, and leave, and no one will notice that he'd been there. They'll only notice that something's missing.

That is how some understand this. But realize that neither Jesus nor Paul, or Peter, by the way, who used the same language in 2 Peter, said the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. This language is used by Jesus originally, then repeated by Paul and Peter, and even John in the book of Revelation makes reference to it.

Behold, I come as a thief. So we have it from many sources that the coming of the Lord will be as a thief. But if you consider, the idea of the context of all these passages never has anything to do with the secrecy of his coming, but rather the unexpectedness of his coming.

A thief, of course, many times might sneak in at an unexpected hour, take something, and get away unnoticed. But thieves often are caught in the act also. The fact that a person is a thief doesn't mean that he gets away with it, and he's not noticed when he comes.

It is possible that someone in the house will wake up and find the thief there, or may walk into the house and find him there. It has happened before. A thief does not necessarily always do his work undetected.

But what is true of a thief at all times is he never announces when he's going to arrive. And that's the point that Jesus was making when he first birthed this illustration, which was re-echoed in these other New Testament passages. But if you look at Jesus' own statement in Matthew 24, in verse 43, actually beginning with verse 42, Matthew 24, 42, Jesus said, "...watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord cometh.

But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what hour or what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore, be ye also ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son

of Man cometh." So what is the point of this illustration? That you will not know in advance. If the man who lived in the house knew when the thief was coming, he wouldn't go to sleep.

He'd stay awake until the thief arrived, because he'd know the hour that he was coming. He says, so also you don't know the hour when I'll come. The thief doesn't phone ahead and say, be ready, I'm coming at such and such an hour.

Rather, the thief comes at an hour known only to him, and unknown until his arrival to the people in the house. Now once he arrives, he might be seen, he might be detected, if someone happens to wake up. And that is not the point that Jesus is saying.

He's not suggesting that he will come and go undetected. He's saying that his coming will not be announced, will not be heralded. That no one will be able to say, oh, it's right now, it's coming.

It'll come suddenly. And this agrees with the illustration Jesus gave not only of the thief, but of the days of Noah. Immediately preceding the words we just read in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus said it's going to be like the days of Noah.

People ate and drank and were married and given in marriage, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away. So shall it be at the coming of the Son of Man. In other words, people will be going about the regular affairs of life, unknowing that anything is going to change.

Getting married as though their whole life is before them. Eating and drinking as people would never do if they knew that their lives were about to end at that moment. You know, I mean, they're living as usual.

Without any awareness. Totally oblivious to the fact that judgment is about to fall. And his coming is going to be that surprising.

That much of an unannounced thing. Now this gives us, of course, a very different picture than that which many of the popular books on prophecy give us. Because we're told in these books that there are numerous signs of the times.

That we can see them all around us, and that we can know that his coming is near. And some have even felt like there's the ability to set dates because of the signs. Whereas Jesus indicated that there won't be any awareness of it.

Now, it might be argued, well, only the unbelievers will be unexpected it. The believers will know. After all, Paul does say in verse 5 here, you are not children of the light, or he says in verse 4, you, brethren, are not in darkness, that they should overtake you as a thief, but you're children of the light.

It might sound like it's saying the Christians themselves will know, and they won't be surprised when he comes. I would like to suggest another interpretation of that verse in just a moment. But I would just say this.

Suppose Hal Lindsey is right. That all these things are signs. That there's going to be an antichrist who will have everyone laser tattoo a 666 on their forehead or their right hand.

It's not only the Christians who will recognize that. Every unbeliever in the United States has seen the movie *The Omen*. Or seen movies, or read books, or heard the rumors.

People on the street who are totally unchurched and irreligious know about 666. I mean, if these things are really going to happen according to the way that the popular writers are saying, and if these truly are signs of the near coming of Christ, then the whole world will be alerted when these things begin to happen. At least the whole western world, which has been exposed to this literature.

And so it's hard to know how they could be taken by surprise in a case like that. Also, notice that most of the things that are said to be signs of the times of the end by the popular writers are global upheavals. Wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, eventually great plagues on the earth.

These are the kinds of things that are pointed to as signs of the times. You might, of course, notice that all those are derived from a particular understanding of the Olivet Discourse, which identifies the things Jesus said in the Olivet Discourse as pertaining to the last days. In our study of that discourse, I think we saw fairly clearly that most of those passages refer to something that happened in 70 AD and before.

Therefore, they are not given by Jesus as signs of the last days. And the other portents that people point to are from the book of Revelation. We have not studied that book together yet, but I think you'll find that it is very questionable whether the things described in the book of Revelation have to do with signs of the last days.

There are certainly other very credible approaches to the book of Revelation than that which is popularly propounded at the moment. So I would say that there is really nothing of solid evidence that gives these particular things as signs of the near coming of Christ. In fact, both Jesus and Paul give the opposite impression.

Paul says here, it's when they shall say, peace and safety, that destruction will come suddenly upon them. If we're looking at a time of intense persecution and tribulation, and there's hailstones that weigh 100 pounds crashing in on people's heads, and there's locusts going around with stinger tails like scorpions, and there's all of these plagues on the earth, and a third of the world is falling dead, and a third of the waters of the ocean are turned to blood, and people are dying from drinking the water. If this is the way it is just before Jesus comes back, how could it be said, when they shall say, peace and

safety, suddenly he'll arrive? Why would they say, peace and safety, if these kinds of things are happening around them? Furthermore, Jesus, in the passage I just mentioned, indicated that it will be like the days of Noah.

The days of Noah were corrupt days. That's not what Jesus is referring to, however. But certainly the days of Noah were not days of intense plagues on the earth and so forth.

In fact, Jesus points out, they were going about the regular affairs of daily life, unsuspecting that anything out of the ordinary was likely to happen. Getting married, eating, drinking. The point he's making is that life was going on very much as it had been normally for a long time, so that there was no grounds for suspicion that destruction was about to fall upon them.

And so he says, shall it be at his coming. Both Jesus and Paul agree that immediately before the coming of Jesus, it would seem like the world will not be undergoing these tremendous global upheavals. These things are not given in the Bible, as near as I can understand, as signs of the last days.

And Paul indicates, and Jesus indicates, and Peter, quoting Jesus, and the book of Revelation, all these writings indicate that the coming of the Lord will be as a thief, in the sense that it will not be known when it's about to happen. Now, with respect to the question in verse 4, but you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Does that mean that we won't be surprised, as others will be, because we're not in the darkness? I don't believe that is necessarily what he's saying.

Because there's another aspect to the coming of a thief, in the sense that he is an intruder. He is one who comes unwelcomed. He is one whose coming has a negative effect on those to whom he comes.

And to the world, because they live in darkness and are morally unprepared for his coming, because of the darkness in which they live and move and have their being, they are morally unprepared for his coming, therefore his coming will be threatening. It'll be an intrusion, it'll be unwelcome, and it'll be disastrous for them. It will not be that way for us, because we're walking in the light.

Because we live morally and spiritually in the light of the gospel, therefore, though we will still not know when it's going to happen, nonetheless, when it comes, it will not be as though a thief is breaking in. It won't be an unwelcome intrusion. It won't hold any threat or harm to us, as the coming of a thief does.

And I think that's what he means when he says that day will not overtake you as a thief, because we're walking in the light. Walking in the light does not refer necessarily to being more enlightened, as, for instance, being more enlightened than the world, so that we recognize signs of the times that they can't see, because they're in the dark and

we're in the light. That's not what he's talking about.

If you read on in verses 5 through 8, he talks about what being children of light is. It means we're sober, we're watchful, we're living a moral life, we're not being drunken and impropagant like the world. There's a certain way of living that people embrace when they live in darkness.

And there's a different way of living, morally and spiritually, when people are in the light. And he's basically talking about two ways of living. Not so much is he comparing our level of revelation with the level of that of the world around us.

So in saying that we're not in darkness, that his coming should overtake us as a thief, but we're children of light, I believe what he's saying is, though his coming will be as a thief, and Jesus even said that to his disciples, he will come as a thief and therefore they should watch. Yet his coming won't really be like a thief in every respect, because that really is a negative thing. For a thief to break into your house is a bad thing.

But it won't be bad for you, because you're walking in the light, you're prepared. But those who are walking in darkness, his coming will be very bad for them. They're walking in darkness and they're totally unprepared.

So, he seems to be saying that when Jesus comes, it will be a time of relative security. In fact, Jesus said in all of the discourse, when you hear of wars and rumors of wars in diverse places, know that the end is not yet. Do you remember him saying that? It's a funny thing that people use wars and rumors of wars as alleged signs of the near coming of Christ when Jesus indicated they are sure signs that the end isn't near.

That's what Jesus specifically said. That's Matthew 24, I'll give you the verse number. Matthew 24, 6, Jesus said, And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, see that you be not troubled, for all these things must yet come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nations shall rise against nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms, there shall be famines, pestilences, and so forth. All these are just the beginning of sorrows. This is not the end, this is just the beginning.

And so, the point here is that the presence of wars and rumors of wars is an indication that the end is not that near. Because when it is near, people will be saying peace and safety. If there's global world wars going on, you're not going to have people generally saying peace and safety.

In other words, there may be a condition reached where there's a false security, where war, for the moment, seems to have been put aside. Maybe through some kind of pact that's made, maybe by a communist takeover, there's no more war, like the Pax Romana, Rome conquered everything, no one was left to destroy them or to fight them. I don't know in what way such a false peace will come, but the indication is that it will not

be a time of great warfare, but a time of general security and peace, when people just think, wow, we're secure now.

That's when they'll be surprised. Now, notice also, his coming as a thief is not compared with the rapture. It is compared with the destruction of the wicked.

Therefore, to use the thief in the night illustration as a picture of the rapture coming secretly and taking them away, but his coming of destruction of the wicked is seven years later, doesn't fit the passage at all. Because he's talking about the coming as a thief being coming suddenly to destroy the wicked, not coming suddenly to sneak away his church. So you see, that's what it says.

His coming shall be as a thief in the night, then verse 3, for when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as prevail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, don't be afraid. Now, you know, he used a very fearful description of the coming of Christ in verse 3, but he essentially says in verse 4, now don't you be afraid.

Your style of life sets you apart from others as being, really, you are prepared for him to come, and they aren't, and that's why we can use such horrendous images. It'll be destruction, it'll be like prevail on a woman, there'll be no escape. And by the way, he speaks of the same thing in his next epistle to the Thessalonians, in 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 8. It's actually a continuation of the sentence in verse 7, but 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 8 says that Jesus will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So it will be a time of destruction to the wicked, but not for us. So he goes on to comfort further, and by the way, notice, at the end of chapter 4, in verse 18, he said, So also, in chapter 5, verse 11, he says, So the discussion in chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, about the fact that those who have died in Christ will rise before we're caught up, that is intended to comfort them along certain lines, considering those who have died. So also, this present discussion, in verses 1 through 11 of chapter 5, is supposed to comfort them, too, along other lines, however.

That though the coming of Christ will come suddenly, unexpectedly, as a thief in the night, yet there's no fear for those who are walking in the light. Those of us who remain in the light and walk according to God's light need not fear. We should be comforted by this fact.

Though it might come as a great surprise and shock when Jesus suddenly appears, yet it will not be anything that we have to fear. It will be, in fact, a joyous occasion for us. So, he goes on to describe the fact that we're not in darkness, but we are in the light.

We're children of the day. And so it says in verse 5, Now, I would like to say that the



language of this section, verses 5 through 8, is echoed elsewhere. Notice the key elements here.

He talks about being children of the light and children of the day. He talks about a certain behavior that is characteristic of people who are in night. And, of course, he uses natural night and natural sleep and natural drunkenness as an illustration of spiritual day or spiritual night and spiritual drunkenness and so forth.

When he advocates that we should be sober, he's saying far more than that we should avoid getting drunk. He's talking about a certain sobriety in our character. And when he says to be watchful and not sleep, he's clearly not denying us the right to go to sleep at night.

He's talking about a spiritual watchfulness. So he's using day and night as, you know, those are terms that have a natural meaning, but he's giving them a spiritual meaning. And he gives the illustration, what do people do at night? Well, if they're going to do anything wicked and shameful, they're going to do it at night.

They're going to do it under the cover of darkness. They'll party at night. It's very rare for them to get drunk in the daytime.

And that's why when the disciples on the day of Pentecost were accused of being full of new wine, Peter simply got up and refuted that argument by saying, well, it's just the third hour of the day. It's nine o'clock in the morning. These can't be drunk.

People don't get drunk in broad daylight. It was just not customary. Rather, they did things that were shameful and wrong at night.

Now, of course, there are some people whose whole lives were characterized by shameful activity and sinful activity. So therefore, he says, they live in a continual night, a spiritual night, and their actions are suitable for those who are in the dark. But we live in a continual day.

And since people don't go out and get drunk in the daytime, we should consider that ourselves are continually living in the daylight of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we live in a sobriety and a watchfulness, which is characteristic of people who are awake in the daytime and not getting drunk. But he's talking spiritually.

And he indicates that this maintenance of a watch is like a military watch. When he says we should watch and be sober, keep watch, the night was divided into four watches for military assignment, for people to watch for the enemy. And a watch was three hours, usually, and there would be a changing of the watch, a changing of the guard every three hours.

The watch, actually, though it literally means to lose sleep, is a reference to a military

watch, which is clear from the fact that he goes on to describe our armor in verse 8. We need to put on the breastplate of faith and love and for our helmet the hope of salvation. Now, I'd like to point out there are at least two other places in Paul's epistles where he combines all these thoughts, namely the fact that we're children of the light, that we are to keep watch, we're not to get drunk, that is to say we're supposed to be spiritually sober and watchful, and that we are to be armed. These concepts that are brought together in these two verses also appear together in both Ephesians and Romans.

Let me turn you to Romans first, Romans chapter 13. And as I read a short passage from Romans 13, you'll notice the recurrence of so many of these same points together in this passage. In Romans 13, verses 11 through 14, Paul says, And that knowing the time, that it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lust thereof.

You'll notice again a contrast made between night and day, the terms used a little differently in this case because night would appear to be the time of Jesus' absence as opposed to the day being when He comes. Nonetheless, we belong to the day. Even though the day has not come, we have been birthed into that new creation spiritually already, so our real affiliation is with that coming day, that coming new creation.

In the meantime, we live in a darkened world where everyone else is in the dark, and it says we're not supposed to live like people do at night. People who are dishonest try to maintain a cloak for the dishonesty, keep it under cover in the dark. In the daytime, in broad daylight, you don't do dishonest things such as you do at night.

So He says let's walk honestly as in the day. That is, our lives should be characterized by honesty just as people don't do dishonest things out in the open light of day. They do it under the cover of darkness.

But we're always in the daylight of Jesus. Therefore, our lives should be honest and not in rioting and drunkenness and such things as He also mentions in 1 Thessalonians, which are things that are done at night by people. And since they are done at night, it illustrates the fact that they're shameful things.

They would do them in daylight if they weren't shameful. And if they're shameful, they don't belong in our lives because we're children of the day. And He mentions also the armor.

This time in verse 12, He says, let us put on the armor of light. Though He doesn't

designate specific pieces of armor, He nonetheless mentions armor. Now we go to Ephesians.

Yes. That was Romans 13, verses 11 to the end of the chapter, verse 11 through 14. Romans 13, 11 through 14.

Now let's turn to Ephesians. Here we have to take two separate passages at the end of Ephesians, but we find that nonetheless in this epistle, the same thoughts recur. In Ephesians 5, we could begin at verse 8, after He tells us not to do the things that the children of disobedience do and not to be partakers with them.

In verse 8, He says, Ephesians 5, 8, For ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the Spirit is know of goodness and righteousness and truth, proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light, for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore, he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time for the days that are evil. Wherefore, be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein his excess would be filled with the Spirit.

Notice again the reference to day and night, more particularly darkness and light, which are the main features of night and day, of course. And he's saying that we need to walk as children of light, in verse 8. He says we're not to have fellowship with the works of darkness, in verse 11. That is the kinds of things that people do in the dark.

He says of such things, in verse 12, those are shameful things. It's a shame even to speak of them, the things that people do in the secrecy of darkness of the night. The reason they do them in the dark is because they're shameful things.

And so he says, however, light makes them manifest, and our lives need to be as lightbearers in this world. We ourselves need to make sure we don't fall asleep spiritually. In verse 14, awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

And then, of course, we're exhorted not to be drunk, literally drunk, in verse 18, drunk with wine. So you see those thoughts appearing again as we've had them in Romans and in 1 Thessalonians. And I would point out also that Ephesians 6 goes into the armor in detail, more detail, in fact, than any of the other passages do.

And he gives five pieces of armor that he considers to be our full equipment, the full armor of God. Right, things done in secret means under the cover of darkness, of course. Yeah, at least as he's using the term darkness.

Darkness, in all of these passages, darkness is basically the environment in which shameful things are done. They're done undercover, more or less. They're done out of the view of the public because the persons who do them would be ashamed to do them in the light.

So the fact that they're done in secret is sort of parallel to the thought that they're done in darkness. They're not exposed to the public scrutiny. Okay, so I want to point out one other thing about this passage in Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 5, verse 8, where he talks about the armor. Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for in Helmet the hope of salvation. Now, the reason I call special attention to this verse is that it mentions a breastplate and a helmet.

These are two of the pieces of armor that are mentioned also in Ephesians 6. However, they are designated otherwise there. In Ephesians 6, the breastplate is said to be the breastplate of righteousness. Here, we are told that the breastplate is the breastplate of faith and love.

Now, this should tell us something. For one thing, it would show that at different times when Paul is writing, he might shift images. He doesn't necessarily have a technical concept that there's a breastplate called righteousness and something else like this.

At least, one might get that impression. But when you consider what faith and love really imply to Paul, what is faith and love? Faith, of course, is our response to God, and love is our response chiefly in relationship to our brothers and sisters. What does faith accomplish for us from God? Well, principally, the thing Paul emphasizes the most in his writings is that we are justified by faith.

We are declared righteous by faith. Our righteousness is of faith. Faith gives us the righteousness to stand before God.

And in Ephesians, the breastplate is righteousness. Here, it's said to be faith and love. Faith is the medium through which imputed righteousness is ours.

Love is really the outworking of righteousness in relationships. If you do the loving thing, you will be doing what is righteous in the sight of God. Jesus said if you love, all the law and the prophets is wrapped up in that one command.

If you love your neighbors yourself, then you basically will fulfill the righteous demands of the law. A loving life is a righteous life. You don't do injustice to a person that you

love.

And therefore, if you're loving, you are doing the just thing. You are living in practical righteousness. Now, righteousness has two sides.

It has the imputed and the practical side. We are legally imputed righteous by our faith. Practical righteousness is seen in the fact that we walk in love toward each other and do the loving and just thing toward each other.

So, in a sense, there's no contradiction. In one place, he simply says the breastplate is righteousness in Ephesians. Here, he says, he breaks it down into its two components.

Righteousness has two parts. The imputed part, which is ours through faith. The imparted or the practical righteousness, which is identified with loving our brothers and walking in a way that's consistent in that love.

So, really, the two thoughts of this passage might be wrapped together in Ephesians under this title of righteousness in its two principal aspects. And when he says here, the helmet of the hope of salvation, you realize, of course, that in Ephesians 6, the helmet is simply said to be salvation. Salvation is the helmet.

Here, he says the hope of salvation. We could hardly say there's a contradiction there. It simply shows what aspect of salvation he means.

He's talking about the future aspect. The hope of salvation, obviously, refers to the future aspect of our salvation. And we know that the salvation we have has a past and a present and a future aspect.

The past aspect is that our sins have been forgiven. The penalty of sin has been exhausted in Christ. And, therefore, we have been saved from the penalty of sin.

There's a present, continuing aspect of our salvation because Jesus shall save his people from their sins. We are in the process of being saved from the power of sin in our lives. That's the present aspect of salvation.

We know, of course, there is a future aspect of salvation in which, when Jesus comes, we'll be saved out of the very presence of sin. So, in the past, present, and future, there are three aspects of our salvation. Initially, salvation from the penalty in the past.

Salvation from the power of sin in the present. And salvation from the presence of sin in the future. And the helmet that he has for us to put on is this future aspect, the helmet of the hope of salvation.

Obviously, looking forward to the ultimate deliverance from the presence of sin. And that means, of course, that we live in a dark age. We are children of light living in a dark environment with people who are going in darkness.

And it's a real battle. It's a real battle for us to put up. But one of the things that sustains us in this battle is the hope that someday we won't be in this dark situation.

The day is close at hand. The ultimate fulfillment of our salvation is ahead of us and it's nearer than when we first believed, he said in Romans 13. So, the idea here is that the future aspect of our total salvation out of the presence of this corrupt world and from sin is something that gives us protection in the day of battle, which we are now in.

I had thought of that one also. Right, the one in 1 Peter 1.9 had come to my mind already because it speaks of the future aspect of salvation because it says that we receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls, which is ready to be revealed in the last time. That's a good cross-reference for this.

And the other passage you mentioned, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the salvation that we hope for. We substantially enjoy it now through faith and we hope for it yet to be revealed. Okay, so he starts the chapter talking about the fact that Jesus will come back and when he comes back, it will be a decisive moment of judgment.

Therefore, he moves on to talk about the need for us to avoid living that lifestyle which would cause the coming of Christ to be a threat and a judgment to us, but rather to live in the light, to take up warfare against the tendency toward compromise with the worldly darkness and to walk in this dark world as children of light. It reminds me of something in Philippians 2, just a brief mention in Philippians 2, in verse 15. He says that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation or nation among whom ye shine as light in the world.

So, we are to remain blameless and harmless, that's Philippians 2, verse 15, blameless and harmless sons of God, unrebukable, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom we are shining as light in obviously a dark world. So, uncompromising walk in a world that has a tendency to pull you into habits that are only proper to be done in darkness and they're a shame to be spoken of openly, so we shouldn't do them. Now, beginning with verse 12 and on through essentially the rest of the chapter, I would say at least up to verse 22, we have miscellaneous exhortations.

Some of them are directed to specific groups, others are general exhortations to Christians altogether. As far as those that are to specific groups, I believe verses 12 through 15 to be of that sort. You'll notice in verse 12 it says, we beseech you brethren.

In verse 14 it says, now we exhort you brethren. Now, twice he addresses brethren. It is my opinion, just based on the content of these two sections, that it is two different groups of brethren in view.

Let's read what is said and then we'll see who the two groups are. Verse 12 and 13 says, we beseech you brethren to know them which labor among you and are over you in the

Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake and be at peace among yourselves. So this group is obviously those who are under authority.

The exhortation is to brethren who have rulers over them in the church. They are what we might call the sheep, the under-shepherds that God has set up in the church, the elders and whatever. So it is basically an exhortation to have a proper response and appreciation for the elders or the leaders in the church.

I'll comment more about that in a moment, but then let's look at the other two verses, 14 and 15. Now we exhort you brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men, see that none render evil for evil unto any man, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men. Now, or unto all simply, men is in italics.

My belief is that after exhorting the sheep in their attitude toward their shepherds, he turns to the shepherds and speaks to them of their duty toward the sheep. That is, the brethren, in verse 12, are those who are under authority. The brethren, in verse 14, are those who are in authority.

And that seems to follow from some of the things he says. Now, what he says in verse 14 could apply to all Christians, admittedly. Anyone might be exhorted to warn those who are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, and be patient toward all men, although those exhortations would have special relevance to those who were charged with the oversight of the church, to warn them against false doctrine and to comfort those who are in a weak spot and so forth.

Those would have particular relevance to the leaders. But verse 15 particularly says, see that none render evil for evil to any. Now, who would be in the position to see to that? Those who are overseeing the church.

I mean, the average Christian would not have the position to discipline, for instance, members that behave wrongly toward each other or who reward evil for evil. But the leaders in the church would be the ones to whom the shepherding and discipline of the church would be entrusted, and therefore this exhortation would seem to be theirs. And then it goes on in the same verse, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all, all men.

The word men is in italics and needn't be put there. It could be meaning both among yourselves, you leaders, deal justly and rightly among yourselves and also toward all those who aren't in your group, in your circle. So that is maybe a point that can't be proven, but my conviction is verses 12 and 13 are addressed to the flock and verses 14 and 15 to the shepherds.

Now let's look at these two sets of exhortations particularly. In verse 12, we beseech

you, brethren, to know them which labor among you and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Now, know them is usually translated differently in modern translations.

I don't know if anyone here has another translation open before them. I think appreciate is one of the ways that the modern translations translate this. What do you have there, the New King James or what do you have there? Is that the NIV in front of you? What does verse 12 say there in the NIV? Respect, okay.

Yeah, okay, so to respect is what is one of the thoughts of the Greek word to have a certain amount of respect for people who have been raised up in authority. Now notice the church was relatively young and it doesn't even seem likely that Paul would have had a chance to ordain elders in the church because he had been run out of town rather suddenly and it's probable that that happened before he had even intended to raise up leaders within the church. Yet already God was spontaneously raising up leaders in the group who were recognized by the church as having an anointing for leadership, who just had gifts of leadership that were recognized and that the church began to spontaneously produce leaders.

Now whether they were officially ordained elders at this point, we can't say. After all, as near as we know, the elders in the early churches were ordained specifically by the laying on of hands of the apostles and Paul may or may not have had a chance to do that before he left. But whether these who are over you in the Lord refer to specifically ordained elders or others that had been spontaneously raised up by the moving of the Spirit of God in the church who had come by reason of that fact to be recognized as having authority in the body of Christ, there was clearly a body of persons in the church who were leaders.

And not only were they leaders, they are characterized as being over the others. Now realize, of course, that it's a manner of speaking. There's another sense in which the leaders could be said to be under the others because Jesus said that he that would be chief among you must be the servant of all, has to lower himself.

It's a manner of speaking. There's a sense in which those who rightfully are the leaders are those who make themselves under and supporters of this church, not those who in a condescending manner hand down decrees from a higher position. Nonetheless, it is quite correct to speak of those in authority as being over you because they do wield the authority in the church.

And hopefully they are servants as well. But it's very clear that the church had distinct persons recognized as being over others in the Lord. They had a certain position of authority.

They were in the position to admonish. The word admonish means to warn them. And



that's why it's interesting that in verse 14 it says to those brethren, warn them that are unruly.

Apparently the duty of leaders, one of the main duties was to warn those who are on the wrong road. And so he describes them as such in verse 12 and then he speaks to them in verse 14 and tells them to warn the unruly. So that would be again further evidence that there's been a shift here in the audience that he's speaking to.

I would like to say also that there are, what does it mean to respect those in authority? Hebrews chapter 13 adds to our knowledge of the duty of church members to relate to those who are over them in the Lord. Hebrews 13.7 says, Remember them that have the rule over you. Sounds like the same kind of a situation.

There were some in the church who had the rule over others. Who have spoken unto you the word of God. That corresponds with who admonish you.

They use the word of God as a tool for correction over your life. That is basically the way they rule. They rule not by arbitrary ego self-exaltation, but really by just communicating what God said on the subject.

That's the proper way to rule in the church is to communicate the word of God and warn those who are violating it. So to remember them, he says, and it says, whose faith follow, that is follow their example, considering the end of their conversation. So there is an exhortation to remember them and to apparently remember their example in particular so that you would follow it.

Then later in the same chapter in Hebrews 13 and verse 17, we read, obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves for they watch for your souls as they that must give an account that they may do it with joy and not with grief for that's not profitable for you. So there are some, again, who are said to have the rule over you. They were mentioned earlier and now they're mentioned again.

In verse 7 that we were told that we must remember them and follow their example. Here the word obey is used. Obey them.

Now that should be understood, of course, within a limited context. It doesn't mean that they become the Lord. And Peter said to the elders, do not lord over the sheep.

Unfortunately, some would take a verse like this and use it as a license to make the whole church, you know, the slaves under a dictatorial church leader. Obey them that have the rule over you would have to do with in their authority that they've been given to watch for your souls. It says, for they watch for your souls, they've got to give an account.

That means that the leaders have to give an account before God for the state of the

souls that were put under them. Jesus, in his prayer in John 17, gave an account to the father for the disciples. He says, all those that you've given me, I have not lost any except the son of perdition.

And that was just so the scripture could be fulfilled. But at the end of his ministry, he had to give an account for his sheep. He had to answer to his father and give an account for the state of his sheep.

And he was able to give a positive report, except about Judas. And the implication here is the shepherds in God's flock are going to have to answer to the chief shepherd. They're going to have to give an account to him for the state of the sheep.

And that's a scary thing. When you consider that a pastor is going to have to answer for the spiritual condition of his sheep when Jesus comes. And when I look at many churches, I would not want to be in the shoes of their pastors when you consider the state of the sheep in some of those places.

But realize also that a person cannot be held responsible for something unless he has certain authority to act. I mean, the only reason a man can be disqualified from leadership, for instance, if his children are rebellious, obviously he's required, he's going to have to give an account for the way his children turn out. Why can that happen? Because he has the authority to tell his children what to do.

His children have to obey him. If they don't obey him, or if they didn't have to obey him, he could hardly be held accountable for their behavior. If it was proper for him, for them to ignore his instructions, and to rebel, and counter his instructions, then how in the world could he ever be held accountable for the way they turn out? The only reason he can be made accountable for the way his children turn out is because he has authority over them, and if he doesn't use it, then he's accountable.

But if he does use it, they must obey him. He has power over his children, and therefore he is responsible for the product. The same is true in other realms of leadership.

If a man is accountable for the way things turn out, there must be a corresponding authority that is involved. And that is why the writer of Hebrews says, obey them, because they have to give an account. If you don't obey them, how can they give any account for what you do? They might give you good instructions, but you don't carry out their instructions.

So, I mean, it doesn't make sense. God intends for these men to be accountable for your souls, and that means he intends for you to obey them, at least in those respects that affect the watch they keep over your soul. It doesn't mean that you have to obey them in every job decision or things like that, but rather in those things that relate to your spiritual benefit.

The doctrine you teach or believe, the moral conduct of your life, perhaps the order in your home, or whatever, things that relate to the kingdom of God are things where the leaders in the church have some authority to direct. And, of course, they are already identified in verse 7 as those who speak the word of God unto you. I would say that a leader who does not use the word of God as the basis for his instructions disqualifies.

I would say these verses do not apply to leaders who are usurpers or who are leaders who do not make the word of God the authority under which they submit. You see, the leader must submit to the authority of the word of God. And then, as he stands under proper authority, then there are those who are under his authority and he speaks the word of God and they submit to him, but in submitting to him they're really just submitting to the word of God because that's what he's he's just communicating the word of God.

If he's doing something else, if he's giving instructions and orders that are unscriptural, then he relinquishes any authority that he had. And he'll obviously have to give a serious account for his misdeeds there. But the point here is that there is instruction to obey and to remember and to imitate those who are have a gift of ruling in the church, among the gifts of the Spirit in Romans, and I believe even it's in Romans there's the gift of ruling.

One of the gifts is the gift of ruling and this would be, of course, reference to those who have authority positions in the church. I would turn your attention also back to 1 Thessalonians this time verse 13 where it says and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake and that you be at peace among yourselves. Now, when it says be at peace among yourselves this is largely to make the elders work easy.

When there's disputes among sheep that's one of the biggest headaches that a Christian leader has is to settle petty disputes. He's telling them let's make it easy on them. Be at peace among yourselves.

Just honor them and esteem them highly in love. What does it mean to esteem them highly in love for their work's sake? This seems to be parallel to the instructions that Paul gave to Timothy about elders in 1 Timothy 5 verses 17 and 18 or actually 17 through 20. This again is instructions concerning the treatment of leaders in the church.

1 Timothy 5, 17 through 20 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor especially they who labor in the word and doctrine for the scriptures say it thou shalt not muzzle the ox but tread it out the corn and the laborer is worthy of his reward. Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses them that sin rebuke before all that others may fear. Now this is sort of an amplified version of his statement esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

What is their work? He said if they rule well and if they labor in the word and in doctrine that is their work. And you should esteem them highly for their work's sake. What does it

mean to esteem them? Well, first of all, verse 17 part of esteeming them is to account them worthy of double honor.

And this honor actually refers to in this case financial support because he goes on to say for the scripture's sake you shall not muzzle the ox but tread it out the corn. Paul quotes the same Old Testament verse in 1 Corinthians 9 to support the right of full-time ministers to be supported by the ministry. So honor here actually the Greek word can mean honorarium and it's the same word that's used earlier in the same chapter which says honor widows that are widows indeed and it really means support them add them to the list of those that would be supported.

So the elder one way to esteem them highly is to support them. By the way, an elder minister has the right to turn down support as Paul did. And for instance the leaders in this school are not supported except in that housing and meals in the dining hall are provided.

So there is support for the elders here. But as far as money there's no salary. But anyway, that's part of properly esteeming the leaders.

Then a second part of esteeming them is in verse 19 against an elder don't receive an accusation but by two or three witnesses. Now we shouldn't really receive accusations unless we have two or three witnesses anyway against anyone. However, sometimes we have very little choice.

We hear something about someone we don't have opportunity to hear whether there's a confirmation but immediately we need to take a course of action or we need to beware of such a person because we've heard such a thing about them. However, if the person is a leader realize that accusations passed around irresponsibly among the church about leaders quickly become damaging gossip. To gossip about an ordinary church member is bad enough and it creates tremendous risk and strife in the church.

But to gossip about an elder is extremely damaging because, of course, it undermines the elder's credibility and limits his ability to impart anything spiritually. I know as soon as I begin to hear things against a pastor's character suddenly his sermons just go, you know, like water off a duck's back. I hear his words and I'm saying, ah, but I know this about him and I just don't take him seriously anymore.

You know, I mean, it greatly destroys not only the unity of the church but the effectiveness of the minister for him to be irresponsibly charged with alleged fault. Now, if a minister is in error, if an elder has sinned, well, that should be established the same way anything is officially established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. So don't receive an accusation against an elder unless you've got two or three witnesses to that effect.

I remember a case where there was an elder in a church I was in. I was even an elder with him but we didn't know his secret life and his own wife accused him to us of being an adulterer and using drugs and things like that and we had not seen this side of him and she talked to me first about it and I didn't know what to do because I knew she was a reliable woman and we later found out what she said was confirmed but when she told me it was just one witness and I told her, I said, you know, I'm not saying that I think you're dishonest at all but scripturally I cannot receive this accusation unless there's further witnesses and I'll just trust the Lord if he wants this to come to light that there will be other witnesses to this because biblically I can't receive, even though I was an elder in the same church, I just said I can't receive an accusation against an elder but by two or three witnesses and the Lord honored that and there were other witnesses came forth and he was exposed but when he is exposed though it might seem like the elder is made more immune from attacks on his character yet he bears a greater penalty as well because it says those who sin and in the context it means elders who sin rebuke before all now individuals who sin should be rebuked privately Jesus said that in Matthew 18 if someone sins against you go to him alone privately if he won't hear you go with one other witness or two if he doesn't hear that then make it public you don't rebuke the common Christian if he doesn't publicly unless he's done a public crime but if an elder sins even if it's a secret sin it's a public offense because he's a public spokesperson and a high profile representative of the church and if he sins he needs to be rebuked publicly that's why it's quite right in this Jim Baker scandal and so forth for these sins to be brought out publicly he's a public figure in the church and Paul rebuked Peter publicly for a sin he wouldn't have done the same thing to a lesser man in the church but Peter was a visible leader it says in James chapter 3 be not many masters for we who are shall receive a stricter judgment and while it is true that leaders are to be somewhat more immune to gossip that is to say you should not accept any gossip any accusation against them unless there is at least two witnesses whereas you might in some cases accept an accusation against someone else on lesser evidence because you just don't have any choice in the situation the elder is made somewhat more immune to gossip yet when his when the things that are said against him the accusations are shown to be true then the rebuke must be public and of course the humiliation is greater and so there there is a sense in which you honor you esteem the leaders highly but he carries a great responsibility if he if he abuses his position and sins then he stands to be publicly censured as opposed to the more private method of confronting sin with other people well this is what Paul teaches in these various passages about how one is to relate to spiritual authority then in verse 14 I'm I'm convinced he turns to the authorities themselves and says now we exhort you brethren first Thessalonians 5 14 now we exhort you brethren and it's interesting he uses the word exhort here although perhaps beseech could be substituted according to the margin but the word in verse 12 is we beseech you brethren it's more more like he appeals gently to the flock the sheep but he he exhorts strongly those who are the leaders because they need they need to understand that he's coming authoritatively and they need to receive his authority to exhort them on this

point warn them that are unruly since it is said of those who are over the church in verse 12 that they admonish you or warn you it seems like these are the ones that are now being addressed warn those who are unruly that is a valuable service to perform I know pastors who are aware of gross sins in their church and do not warn the members there are pastors who have masons in their church members of the masonic lodge there is a church I know of that has a wife beater or a child beater and molester in a prominent position in the church there's another church I heard of that where one of the Sunday school teachers was living in adultery and these are evangelical churches the pastors would never smile on such activities yet they were aware of them and remained silent about them and that is not love it might seem to be loving but that's really just a spineless kind of sentiment a true Christian love would warn the unruly because those persons are on a path that leads to destruction they're on the broad road and you need to warn them to get on the other narrow road and to repent that is the duty of those in authority in the church comfort the feeble minded now feeble minded actually I think in modern English feeble minded usually refers to people who are somewhat mentally retarded or something but but feeble minded here probably just means people who are downcast people whose minds are feeble from basically exhaustion with battling their problems and their they're feeble they're about ready to collapse it's like comparable to the words in Hebrews 12 strengthen the the knees that are feeble and lift up the hands that hang down that is strengthen and comfort those who are at their wits end support the weak there are some people in the church who are weaker than others there are weak sheep sometimes it's very difficult for a leader to be patient with a person who is chronically weak I'll tell you there's some that we've had in this school and in this community that have had chronic moral weaknesses and we are aware of it we deal with them we counsel them we repeatedly exhort and warn them and there appears to be repentance and yet their weakness causes recurrence after recurrence eventually usually most most of these people end up leaving only once have we ever asked a person to leave or forced a person to leave but most of the time they leave on their own because they're too weak to stay but the point is it's very perplexing to leaders to have to deal with people who chronically fall into the same weaknesses and therefore after he says support the weak he says be patient toward all because that's one of the hardest things to a person who is further along spiritually and has overcome a lot of the basic sins and the basic weaknesses and whose spiritual life is somewhat more mature more well established it can be vexing to be constantly dealing with people who for some reason can't get the victory over these things and you know after you've been when you've given up smoking for instance I never smoked but I know that a lot of people here have given up smoking it's maybe a struggle when you're giving it up but once you've given it up and it's no longer a battle and it's years behind you and you haven't smoked for a long time of course the battle you went through might make you compassionate to others who are going through it but the opposite sometimes happens that you meet someone who smokes and they can't seem to get over it and you think why can't you get over it I got over it especially if you didn't struggle with it if you gave it up easily and it's

no longer it's not a weakness of yours it's hard to be patient with those who are weak you know it's so tempting to say why don't you just repent you know and in fact you do say that and they say well I tried to repent but I can't stop it's you know when you don't have these problems yourself and of course people who are spiritually mature don't then there's the temptation to get impatient with the weaker ones and so Paul has to exhort support the weak and be patient toward all and then he says see that none render evil for evil to any man this would be part of the discipling process one of the hardest things to instill in a Christian in Christian character is the non-retaliating spirit Jesus taught it this way you know turn the other way turn the other cheek if someone wants to sue you give them what they ask for if they compel you to go a mile walk two miles love those who who hate you bless those who curse you the spirit of non-retaliation is the spirit of Christ and yet it is the most contrary aspect of the spirit of Christ to our own nature it seems to me I don't know of any part of the Sermon on the Mount that Christians try to explain away more or try to deny than those portions of the Sermon on the Mount that say that we have to turn the other cheek and not ever render evil for evil and never never pay back anyone that does wrong to us I mean those passages seem to be the ones that make Christians and everyone most uncomfortable because they go across our grain more than most and Paul echoes the words of the Sermon on the Mount in another passage in Romans chapter 12 on the same point Romans 12 he says in verse 17 recompense no man evil for evil but provide things honest in the sight of all men if possible as much as life and you live peacefully with all men dearly beloved avenge not yourselves but rather give place to wrath for God has said vengeance is mine I will repay saith the Lord so he says don't avenge yourselves don't recompense evil for evil this is something we need to be reminded of again and again because it is so natural for us to feel like I've been wrong therefore I can wrong him now of course the grossest example of this is if someone hits you and you hit them back but a lot of times we become more refined in our Christian walk so that we don't hit people back we forswear violence and we're not a striker and so forth but we still react in a sense vengefully the persons that hurt us the most we become cool to them we become aloof from them there's a sense in which we're punishing them because they didn't treat us well the most difficult thing is to really give yourself in a loving and ungrudging way to those that have done you the most wrong it's much easier to insulate yourself from them and hang out with people who are friendly to you but there's a need for us to totally overcome that vengeful retaliatory tendency in us and so the disciples in the church the leaders in the church are to see to it that no one renders evil for evil they need to be taught and they need to be directed and even disciplined if it happens that someone is rendering evil for evil for but ever follow that which is good both among yourselves and to all men so we have the instructions to the leaders apparently then we have general instructions which seem to apply to everyone the reason I think there's a break here in this that he's no longer just speaking to leaders is well because the things that he says are so general and so applicable across the board to all Christians and also because all the following exhortations are rapid fire short abrupt staccato kind of exhortations it seems as though

he's kind of quickly he's got he's running out of papyrus you know his page is coming to an end he has a lot of things he wants to say but he'll just summarize it in a lot of short exhortations that are given in rapid succession and they apply obviously the nature of them apply to Christians generally rejoice evermore pray without ceasing in everything give thanks for this is the will of God and Christ Jesus concerning you quench not the spirit despise not prophesying prove all things hold fast that which is good abstain from all appearance of evil these are the these are the the things now actually with respect to sanctification we could say that these exhortations reflect our role in sanctification sanctification is a process of becoming holy persons in character and depending on which school of thought you lean to more you will be likely to attribute to God or to man the greater weight of responsibility in sanctification the Calvinist of course would be more inclined to say it's all a work of God God sanctifies us it's not a work of man in any sense it's a divine work upon us the opposite school would tend to lean the other way it's your it's your decision you decide to do the right thing you are involved in the sanctification process and God can't make you holy if you won't agree with him and so forth and apparently the truth of the matter is that sanctification is a joint effort with us laboring together with God us cooperating with God God has a part to play which we can't play what God does we can't do and therefore he must do it or it won't get done but there's also something we have to do which we are required to do and I believe that in verses 16 through 22 we have our responsibility in the area of sanctification whereas in verses 23 through 24 we see God's responsibility in it as you'll see and the very God of peace sanctify you holy and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ faithful is he who calls you who also will do it obviously focusing on what God is to do in your life there's something you must do and those are given in the form of exhortations there's something God must do and those are given in the form of promises exhortations are to be obeyed promises are to be believed and enjoyed and embraced so there's he closes out the letter with this business now he's been talking about holiness and that we are called to holiness he pointed that out at length in the first part of chapter 4 now what are we to do? what will help us grow in the direction of holiness? the first exhortation he gives in verse 16 is rejoice evermore evermore would seem to mean continually increasing that our joy would not only continue but it would increase as time goes on there's a sense in which we are commanded to rejoice and therefore it is an obligation rejoicing is of course to take joy to be delighted to be joyful in a situation and you remember in Philippians 4 Paul stressed it Philippians 3 and 4 he said rejoice evermore then he later says rejoice evermore and again I say rejoice rejoice more always and again I say rejoice it's not he says burdensome for me to repeat these things to you it's for you, it's safe rejoicing is something that is Paul said safe for us spiritually it keeps us safe and it is something that we can choose to do in the world you are happy or sad that is a non-Christian is happy or sad depending on whether his circumstances seem to warrant it if his circumstances are favorable and desirable you may be happy although to tell you the truth in the world a lot of people aren't even very happy for some reason even when their circumstances are



favorable they just lack happiness altogether but still it is considered that favorable circumstances are conducive to happiness whereas unfavorable circumstances are conducive to being unhappy the Christian is to always be rejoicing which means that he must even when it's against the the pressure of circumstance it is in fact an obligation to continue to rejoice because we have a constant cause for rejoicing there is always something for us to rejoice about an unsaved person doesn't always have something to rejoice about because sometimes his circumstances are all bad and there is nothing good going for him but even when our earthly circumstances are bad there is there are the real important things are always in our favor God loves us God has forgiven us David speaks of the joy of the man who the blessedness of the man whose sins are forgiven there is a tremendous blessedness we should always remember that our sins are forgiven we are accepted in the beloved and of course rejoicing in the hope of salvation which others can't rejoice in rejoicing in the fact that Jesus is coming back there is all kinds of things which should immediately lift our spirits if we would dwell upon them and in the midst of adverse circumstances that would tend to drag us down emotionally it is time for us to remind ourselves of those things to fill our minds as Philippians 4 says with those things to think on those things that are pure and good and holy there is very much that if we would call them to our attention would give us cause for continual rejoicing even in the midst of trials in the midst of tribulation there is much to rejoice in as a Christian because the trials that we have are only on the earthly temporal level and we look not at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen and when we look at those things we have a continual cause to rejoice now if it is not our natural response to rejoice even in those things then we are required to rejoice anyway and that would be an act of our will that would be to say I refuse depression I will not allow it I have no cause for depression I am going to be joyful in God and so David in the Psalms sometimes speaks that way Why art thou cast down on my soul? Why art thou disquieted with me? Rejoice in God He commands his soul to rejoice and he says I will rejoice several times in the Psalms I will rejoice in the God of my salvation that is an act of the will I will he doesn't say I shall as though he is just predicting that it will happen saying I will which is saying I have determined it is my will to do so and to rejoice because it is a command it is therefore also a possibility a choice that we make and if a person is dejected and depressed they are a Christian who is in that state is actually in sin because he is refusing to do what he is commanded to do to rejoice in the Lord and to and to rejoice in all those benefits David said in Psalm 103 Bless the Lord on my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name bless the Lord on my soul and forget not all his benefits it is only as we forget his benefits or if we remember them we devalue them or think them small that we that we cease to rejoice but we rejoice evermore if our focus is is perpetually upon the things that God has promised us and given us in verse 17 it says pray without ceasing this is understood variously some understand it to mean that we should be praying all the time and this is this seems impossible to pray all the time some would say there are two solutions to this to help us pray all the time one is you can speak in tongues a lot whenever you are driving down the street or whenever

you are alone you can if you don't have anything on your mind to pray about just speak in tongues so you can pray without ceasing that way others would say well this is really speaking of being in a continual attitude of prayer not necessarily saying prayers all the time but having in your own spirit an attitude continually always about your prayer where there is a sense in which you are really in the spirit offering yourself up to God at every given moment these are two possible ways in which it is suggested that we can always be praying I disagree with both suggestions though the second one in particular is very commonly taught from this verse I don't think Paul means that we are supposed to be praying 24 hours a day and prayer without ceasing if it means don't ever have a time when you are not praying that would mean that you have prayed through the night hours you couldn't sleep because you obviously aren't praying when you are sleeping either consciously or unconsciously you are not praying if you are then it is the kind of thing that you do without thinking because obviously you can't consciously pray when you are sleeping if you do it automatically without thinking then why be exhorted to do it I mean if it is something that is just happening all the time whether you are awake or asleep then why give anyone the expectation that they should do it it is happening anyway obviously he can't be saying that we should at every moment be praying because prayer is a conscious communication with God and when you are asleep for instance you have to cease doing that kind of praying so what does he mean when he says prayer without ceasing I think that could be understood perhaps by comparing it with the exact same language that he uses I think it is in Romans chapter 1 Romans 1.9 Paul says For God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers making request if by any means now at length I might have prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you he says without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers Paul had times when he was saying prayers and every time he did that he continually in his prayer time consistently brought up his requests for these people for this particular church there was not a prayer time that went by that he didn't pray for these people in his prayers he continually or without ceasing made reference to this church it is unreasonable to suggest that Paul is saying that every moment of every day 24 hours every day he was praying for these Romans it just is I personally believe that it is humanly impossible and unreasonable to suggest that that is what he is saying it is rather saying that they prayer for them made up a regular and consistent part of his daily prayer life now pray without ceasing can be literally taken this way as well as the way we suggested before that if you are praying for something let's say you pray in the mornings and you are praying for something to happen and it doesn't happen therefore you pray for it again the next day it doesn't happen you pray again the next day it doesn't happen you pray again the next day it doesn't happen so you give up and stop praying for it you cease praying for it you see now I believe that when he says pray without ceasing he means don't cease to pray for things simply because they don't immediately happen persist in prayer pray without ceasing doesn't mean that there should never be an end to your time of prayer that all day long you have to be in conscious prayer I don't really believe that's what happens I

don't believe that's what he is saying I don't believe that's possible I used to teach that that's what it meant I always used to feel since he said it that we can do that but I now have another opinion I believe that what he is saying is that don't give up on your prayers prayers are not always immediately answered but don't cease don't give them up don't put them aside but continually, repeatedly don't give up or cease to pray for things let prayer be a continuing part of your life and prayer for things that need to be prayed for don't give up praying for them until they come that is how I understand verse 17 here verse 18 then says in everything give thanks for this is the will of God and Christ Jesus concerning you whole books have been written on this one verse it's a very it's a verse that's been brought to the attention of the charismatic movement since the days of Merlin Crothers particularly his books Prison to Praise and so forth focused on this verse the main idea of his books were that we should thank God for everything even trials and he went on to say that of course a lot of times the trials are there just to test us and to see if we'll give thanks in them so that by giving thanks in them we pass the test and they can be removed and so he gave many testimonies how people began to praise God for their trials and their trials went away and eventually believe it or not in the on the street level of the charismatic movement I found when those books first came out by Merlin Crothers that many Christians began to see praise as a means of getting their trials to go away just because he argued this that if you praise the Lord for your trial then you're passing the test the trial is to see if you'll curse God or will you praise the Lord okay the trial comes you praise the Lord will you pass the test the test can be over now God can remove the trial and there are many many testimonies books full of them that this man wrote of people who had testimonies of how they began to praise God for situations that were trying and thank God for them and they went away and I believe those testimonies I believe that really happened and I think his explanation is probably the correct explanation of why they went away but that doesn't mean that praise or thanksgiving is intended as a manipulative device to force God's hand to remove pressure from us when we don't appreciate the pressure I don't like the trial so I'm going to utter words of praise because this is a magic formula that makes bad things go away and that is obviously not a biblical concept that's more like sorcery you know that certain incantations and certain magic words if spoken on certain occasions will bring about favorable results the idea here is to thank God because he is thank-worthy now if your trial goes away even though you you know after you thank him for it well and good but if it doesn't go away you may still thank him for it not to manipulate him to make it go away but because there is good cause to thank him for everything because Romans 8.28 says all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose if you really believe that then you believe that even your trials are to work together for your good and if that is true I'm sure everyone of you can see can look back at certain trials you've been through which were very trying at the time but you can now see some benefit came from it you can now see that many of the things that were the most trying were the most beneficial in your spiritual life or in bringing about some desired circumstance ultimately and you can thank God that you had that

trial well the argument here is if you're going to be able to thank God for it later because you know he's going to bring some good out of it why not thank him now? why wait till you see it? why not thank him by faith for what you know is going to happen? you don't know what's going to happen exactly but you know it will be good you know that whatever is happening to you now is a part of the process that God is using to bring a good result why not thank God for the fact that he's doing that? why not thank God in advance for the result? rather than being brought under the circumstances allowing the trial to burden your spirit down until you see the results and then you thank God for it I mean if you get all bummed out and bitterness and despondent over your trials and after God turns it to something good you say oh wow praise God that happened you know thank God for that you know don't you feel kind of hypocritical? you know you're don't you feel kind of bad that you're thanking God now for something that you're complaining to him about before? better that you know right from the beginning that whatever happens to you God is bringing it there will be a time when you will visibly see good results where you will feel like praising him for it and thanking him for it because you'll see that that is appropriate well if you know by faith that God's going to happen why not begin to enjoy the faithfulness of God now and thank him for it now instead of being up and down like a yo-yo bitterness and complaining when things are going bad and then praise him when things are going good just continually thank him in everything when things are going well thank him when things aren't going well thank him for that too you know that he is worthy to be thanked and that what he's doing is a good thing for you so thank him and this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you I might say that everything is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you in everything give thanks why? because this thing that you are in is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you it may not be what you would have chosen but it's what God has chosen for you to go through his sovereignty is in it it says in Ephesians 1.11 that God Ephesians 1.11 says that God worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will so all things are working according to the counsel of God's will so the circumstance you are in is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you therefore thank him for it because his will can only be good quench not the spirit hard to know exactly what is meant by this it may mean that you should not quench the use of the gifts of the spirit in the church that is how it is commonly applied that someone should not cause the gifts of the spirit not to be functioning in the church because they are quenching the spirit it might mean as some would understand it that in some cases where the spirit is moving in a certain way a person will speak up and do something that is quite out of accord with the direction the spirit is going and will kind of pop the bubble and kind of blow the whole thing and quench the spirit for the whole meeting I have heard the term used this way when some people are sitting around fellowshiping in the Lord and someone walks up with a bad joke or something like that they quench the spirit I don't know which of these things is meant but it is very clear the word quench is a word that refers to putting out a fire to quench a fire is really the meaning of the word and so it is implied that we should not work against whatever the spirit is doing we should not put out the fire of the spirit and it

may mean strictly in our own lives if the spirit is a flame in our lives and we are full of our first love and zeal and so forth and we are not lukewarm but we are hot we should do nothing to grieve the spirit that would put out this flame or that would cause us to become more lukewarm that may be what is meant too I can't really tell you exactly which thought or whether there is another one that Paul intends despise not prophesying despise would in the old English refer to not disregarding don't disregard them take them seriously when someone in the service gives a prophecy take it seriously that is a word from the Lord now don't assume that it is a word from the Lord because we are supposed to test prophecies too in 1 Corinthians 14 it says let the prophet speak two or three and let the others judge and we do need to test prophecies and it even says that next in verse 21 prove all things or test all things and hold fast that which is good verses 20 and 21 are sort of related that way because we are supposed to we are supposed to take prophecies seriously but we should take it not only seriously enough to obey it but we should take it seriously enough to subject it to critical examination since not all alleged prophecies are genuine we need to take it seriously enough to test it and see whether this is of God sometimes I hear prophecies so frequently in churches and they all sound so much alike that I don't tend to take them that seriously anymore I don't even bother to judge them I just figure well this prophecy there is nothing unscriptural in it it doesn't strike me as necessarily a genuine prophecy but it could be or who knows who cares you know it's harmless and in a sense that's not the right attitude when a prophecy allegedly comes forth we should say this may be God speaking directly to us right now and we need to take it seriously we need to actually subject this to the test and say is this a word from the Lord and if it is let's take time for it let's consider it I've often been in charismatic meetings where in worship time several prophecies would come forth and then the worship time would end and they go on with the business as usual and so forth and there would be no reference made to what was prophesied and sometimes that's even happened here and I'm the one who has not given the proper weight to the prophecy but if a prophecy comes forth and it is judged to be a legitimate prophecy it should be considered that if this is really what Jesus is speaking to the church right now maybe this should change the whole direction of the meeting maybe this should be the thing that we should give our full attention to if this is the current word that Jesus is speaking we shouldn't take them lightly or disregard them but we do need to test them we need to prove all things and that would include every teaching we hear every book we read every opinion we're exposed to of others we need to test them to see if they're biblical and hold fast to those which are reject the rest abstain from all appearance of evil