



## 6. 'Living in grace' 1 Thessalonians 5.<sup>12-28</sup>

### Background

The whole of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians illustrates just how big is the change effected by God in conversion. We've seen already how that change has three major dimensions, often summarised as faith, love and hope: in some ways [1 Thess.1.9-10](#) is the pivotal text, a statement on which Paul expands through the rest of the letter.

In this latter part of the letter, from 4.13-5.28, Paul is expanding on the ways in which as believers we are *waiting* for the Lord Jesus. What will the return of the Lord Jesus be like? What will it entail for us? And what will our waiting involve?

Having set out in more general terms (5.1-11) how we are to wait for the coming of the Lord, in this last section of the letter he provides more detail. The final, climactic verse of the letter highlights the truth which undergirds the life which we now live – we are a people saved by *grace*; it is into the world of grace that we have been brought; and it is lives that are marked and defined by grace that we now learn to live.

The series of exhortations, fired off almost in staccato fashion by the apostle, may seem at first sight a rather random set of instructions, but when viewed carefully you'll see that they are grouped around three main themes – which, strikingly (but not surprisingly!) correspond to love (vv.12-15), faith (16-22), and hope (23-27).

The last verse (28), as I say, simply underlines that it is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which drives and defines the manner in which we live out our lives as we wait for Him to come again from heaven.

We have been brought into the kingdom of God, and we discover to our delight that it is the realm of grace: and the experience of that grace which has been shown to us by the Lord becomes the paradigm for the way in which we live. It determines the way in which we relate to others, the way in which we respond to our circumstances, and the way in which we rejoice in the future promised to us. Having been saved by grace, we must now learn to *live* by grace.

Read the whole passage, and if you don't have time for all the 'days' start with '**days**' (2), (4), & (7) where there are additional questions for CG study.

## 1) Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November – Jesus' lordship

Read [1 Thess.5.12-13](#)

*".. hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work .." (1 Thess.5.13)*

The earliest Christian creed says it all: Jesus is Lord. His lordship is given expression in the life of His church, as His leaders embody the ministry of the Good Shepherd – caring for His people and correcting them. Honour Him by honouring them.

What does Paul mean by urging his readers to 'acknowledge' and to 'hold in high regard' these leaders (presumably) who care for and admonish them?

When and how should 'admonition' be given in the life of Christ's church?

**Prayer:** *Thank You, Lord, for those whom You have appointed to care for me and to seek my growth in grace: give me a heart ready to receive instruction and correction.*

## 2) Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> November – work in progress

Read [1 Thess.5.14](#)

*".. be patient with everyone .." (1 Thess.5.14)*

God's work in our lives is gradual: believers are always at best a work in progress, and their needs at any given time will vary. Learn to discern what the present need may be: warning, encouragement, help: comfort, counsel, correction. And always patience.

Should we all be ready to 'warn' those who are 'idle and disruptive', or should that be the responsibility of those who are the pastors of the flock?

How are you able to recognise what different individuals within the fellowship need to hear at any given point in time?

It's sometimes said that it's OK for believers not to be OK: do we recognise adequately that we are all flawed in different ways?

What will your being 'patient with everyone' involve for you with the people you'll be with today?

**Prayer:** *How grateful I am, my Lord, that You are compassionate and gracious, so slow to anger and abounding in love: help me to reflect Your grace in all I do and say today.*

## 3) Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> November – do good to all

Read [1 Thess.5.15](#)

*".. always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone .." (1 Thess.5.15)*

Your conduct as a believer is no longer conditioned by what others have done to you, but by who you are as a child of God. He is kind to the ungrateful (who don't return the favour) and wicked (who do you harm) ([Lk.6.35](#)): do what You see Him doing!

How would you work through what Paul teaches here with a child who's being bullied at school?

To what extent (if any) does what Paul teaches here have application to situations of conflict such as there is in the Middle East today?

**Prayer:** *That You have been kind to the ungrateful and wicked has been my salvation, Lord: teach me as I walk with You what it is both to act justly and to love mercy.*

#### **4) Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> November – pray always**

Read [1 Thess.5.16-18](#)

*".. this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus .."* (1 Thess.5.18)

Your joy is rooted not in your circumstances but in your Saviour, whose commitment to you doesn't change: and the call to 'give thanks' is *in*, and not *for*, all circumstances. Whatever your situation, God means that you share it with Him: He can handle it all!

How can you best cultivate that attitude of constant joy, a posture of constant prayer, and a perspective of constant gratitude in your heart?

**To what extent is joy a hallmark of our life as a fellowship, and how does that find expression?**

Isn't it perverse and almost masochistic to be giving thanks in circumstances which are painful, distressing and wretched? What does Paul mean?

**You find a great illustration of these three verses in [Acts 16.22-34](#)! What lessons can you learn from that narrative to help you handle adversity?**

**Prayer:** *May Your praise be continually on my lips. In the midst of all my changing circumstances, help me to rejoice in the knowledge that You remain the same always.*

#### **5) Friday 17<sup>th</sup> November – hear Him speaking**

Read [1 Thess.5.19-22](#)

*".. Do not quench the Spirit .."* (1 Thess.5.19)

God speaks: the Bible underlines that from the start. Don't just pour out your heart to Him in prayer, but listen, too. Listen for His voice as He speaks by His Spirit – but do so with both a real expectancy and a biblically-informed discernment and care.

What does Paul mean by 'prophecies' and how does he envisage that believers should 'test' them?

In what ways can believers 'quench' the Spirit – and why does Paul use that language?

**Prayer:** *'Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be a flame.'*\* Help me daily to hear what You are saying, to do what You bid me do, and to follow where You lead.

## 6) Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November – made whole

Read [1 Thess.5.23-24](#)

*".. the one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it .."* (1 Thess.5.24)

The God of 'shalom' (peace) has purposed in Jesus is to put our broken humanity together again and to make us whole, conforming us entirely ('through and through') to the likeness of His Son. That may seem impossible! But it's His call, and He'll do it!

Why do you think Paul characterises God here as 'the God of peace'?

How might Paul prayer for the Thessalonian believers here inform the way you pray for your fellow believers?

**Prayer:** *How full of mercy You are, O God, taking a rebel like myself as Your child, and turning the rubble of my waywardness into a life that will glorify Your Name for ever!*

## 7) Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November – by grace alone

Read [1 Thess.5.25-28](#)

*".. the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you .."* (1 Thess.5.28)

Grace is always the bottom line – whether you're an apostle or a new believer. Paul signs off with reference to the primary 'means' of grace. Mutually supportive prayer: regular and personal expressions of love: the teaching of God's Word.

How do these three 'means of grace' find expression in your fellowship?

As you ponder these three final exhortations of Paul (vv.25-27), what pointers do they give as to how you might be a channel of God's grace to others?

*While respecting cultural differences, what lessons does Paul's exhortation to 'greet one another with a holy kiss' have for us today?*

*Although Paul's letters have canonical status in a way that yours don't and won't, might your taking the time to write cards or letters to others be a means of grace to them?*

*In an age of electronic communication, have we largely lost the art of letter writing to our impoverishment?*

**Prayer:** *Your grace towards Your people, Lord, is truly amazing! Help me today, along with Your people, to celebrate Your grace and to be a means of grace to others.*