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Various Instructions for New Converts

By Bryan Hodge

The church at Thessalonica had not existed very long when Paul wrote his first letter to them. He closed the letter with various instructions for these recent converts. These instructions are valuable for every convert. Let us notice...

1. Comfort and Edify One Another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Christians are to help each other stay strong in Christ. They are to comfort each other when death and other difficulties come (1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:14). They are to use their tongues to edify (Ephesians 4:29), and encourage one another on to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). "Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19 cf. 15:1-2). James Coffman wrote, "The responsibility of Christians is to do, practice, say and engage in only those things that contribute constructively to the building up... of fellow Christians. It is not enough merely to refrain from saying what will discourage or damage another, or from practicing what will offend another or from doing what may tempt another. The mandate is to do what will help the spiritual life and growth of fellow Christians" (1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, p. 61).

2. Esteem and Love Those Who Labor Among You and Are Over You in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

It is easy to criticize those who have public roles of leadership. Some pick to the point of causing some men to want to "throw in the towel." If this picking is over opinions and non-salvation issues this is a shame. The Hebrew writer said, "Let them do so (rule – B.H.) with joy and not with grief, for such would be unprofitable to you" (Hebrew 13:17b).

In truth, their hands should be supported (cf. Exodus 17:11-12). They should be remembered in prayer. They should be esteemed for their work. If they rule well, according to the Bible, they should be considered worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17). "They watch all for your souls, as those who must give account" (Hebrews 13:17).

3. Be At Peace Among Yourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:13-15).

A lack of peace and harmony in the church is counter-productive. It will hurt the church's influence in the city. It will discourage and not encourage brethren.

We are to be a peaceful people. Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Paul instructed us, "If it is possible as much as depends on you live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). Again, "We... who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to

please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification” (Romans 15:1-2). The Hebrews writer said, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

4. Rejoice and Pray With Thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Affliction and persecution are mentioned five times in Paul’s letters to these Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 3:3; 3:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1:6). They faced many trials.

Yet, they were to stay focused on reasons they had to rejoice and be thankful in Christ. Consider these words: “What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and His coming?” (1 Thessalonians 2:19); “The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall ever be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live with Him. Therefore, comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:10-11). “It is a righteous thing with God... to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7).

Let us focus on the joy that awaits, and upon God’s goodness to us. Paul describes these things or “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). His love is a love “which passes knowledge” (Ephesians 3:19). “Oh the depth and the riches of God’s saving grace flowing down from the cross for me! There the debt for my sins by the savior was paid in His suffering on Calvary. Oh what marvelous mercy, what infinite love! What immeasurable grace I see! By His blood I am cleansed; I am happy and free thru His suffering on Calvary!” (Song: Oh the Depth and the Riches by Tillit S. Teddlie).

5. Quench Not The Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20).

These words are paralleled with, “Do not despise prophecies.” Remember that the use of miraculous gifts could be suppressed by the one who possessed such gifts (cf. 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Corinthians 14:32). Franklin Camp wrote, “It is a command relative to miraculous gifts” (The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption, p. 190). It may be that some were afraid of boldly proclaiming the message because of the opposition in society, and were not using the God-given abilities which they possessed.

We too can quench the Spirit’s influence and suppress the powerful word of God. We do so by letting fear keep us from proclaiming the word to others. We do so when we will not listen to it ourselves. We do by not using our abilities to His glory. H. Leo Boles remarked, “Indifference, lukewarmness, and idleness all hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. To discourage the work of the Lord is to quench the Holy Spirit” (The Holy Spirit: His Personality, Nature, Works, p. 168).

6. Test All Things (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

God's people are not to be spiritually gullible. We are to put things to a scriptural test. The Bereans are commended because; "They received the word with all readiness, and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). John warns, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Being taught wrong is no excuse. "If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14 cf. Genesis 3; 1 Kings 13:11-ff; Colossians 2:8, etc.).

The test is not the end of the matter. Once the testing is completed a decision and response is needed. If the message is true, receive it and hold fast to it. If the message is found to be not true, abstain from it.

These are indeed very good words for all of us to ponder.