



This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



Hold Fast to God's Love

Study Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5; 2 John 4-11

Lesson 6, January 5th, 2019.

Key Verse

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. 2 John 6

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are very frail people and so knowing this God teaches us, and shows towards mercy kindness. Christian men and women are notorious for their infidelity and their lack of memory and history has shown us that professing believers have great difficulty in remembering what they had been taught by Jesus and by Scripture.

Before Jesus left to go to His Father He warned that before His Second Coming there would be a time of great difficulty and widespread lawlessness. There would be great disorder and violence and men would lose heart and would fear that terrible things were coming on the face of the earth. Matthew 24 and 25 gives us a picture which will alarm us.

Our Study Scripture comes from a chapter that will correct the common attitudes that believing people will have during these very disturbing and incredibly difficult times. There will therefore be tremendous discouragement in the face of difficulties, for the fiery trials that they are undergoing will be real and disheartening. When they cry out that there was no justice and when they think that everything is against them they would have to remember that the Scriptures tell us that God will repay them for the difficulties they were going through as they proved themselves worthy of being in the coming kingdom of God.

Then they should remember that the unbelieving would have a reward when Jesus comes to set things straight. On the day of vengeance there would be destruction for them and exclusion from the presence of the Lord. They should certainly understand that Jesus would come to be glorified in His saints and those that believe in Him would marvel at what He would do.

The conduct of believers in the face of difficulty is the emphasis in this Study lesson. Instruction is given by the Apostle Paul on how they should live and what they should do as they face these times of lawlessness and persecution.

In this letter to the Thessalonians the Apostle tells believers to hold fast to the lessons they had learned and they should take note of the power of prayer so that the work of God that he and they were doing would continue unabated.

From time to time we are reminded and are quite shocked at the persecution that believers in Christ all over the world are undergoing. We have difficulty appreciating the terrors that other believers face because our life is in comparison quite good. But we must remember that many are being persecuted for their faith by people who will pretend they are not doing what they're doing. The context of this Study therefore is very important so that we would understand the importance of prayer and the incredible amount of God's faithfulness to His promises to keep, sustain, and deliver us from evil.

Paul was writing from Corinth in about 52 A.D. and had received word that some prophet or teacher had sent a letter to the Thessalonians with the erroneous information that the "day of the Lord" had come, and the Thessalonians had missed it and they were now therefore living in the time of the Great Tribulation. That would explain why they were being persecuted and afflicted.

Clearly, these believers had forgotten the teachings of Matthew 24 that several events would occur before the "day of the Lord" and that terrible day of judgment on the Earth. They had forgotten or neglected to remember that they would see signs of the Son of Man in the sky, that the tribes of the earth would see these signs and mourn, and they would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory.

The Thessalonians just like the Corinthians lived in cities that were known as the cradle of pleasure, in which drunkenness, immorality, and loose morals were the order of the day. The Apostle Paul and a party had been witnessing successfully in Philippi but when the Apostle Paul threw out a demon from a fortune-telling slave girl and so destroyed a profitable source of revenue for her owners they complained to the chief magistrates about Paul and his party and Paul was beaten and expelled from the city. The Apostle journeyed to Thessalonica and preached in the synagogue on three successive Sabbaths that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead. This Messiah was Jesus Christ. This led to charges from the Jewish community that the missionaries were really messianic agitators that taught about a rival Emperor. This extremely serious charge led to Paul and his friends having to leave the city quietly by night.

The infant Christian community came under immediate active persecution which was probably made worse by the fact that some of the leading women in the community became Christians. Their husband would have hated this development. But despite the persecution the young church stood

firm, spread the message they had believed and because of them the gospel spread throughout Macedonia and Greece with their steadfast faith in God developing for them a great reputation in other churches.

However the eschatological teachings of Paul had been firmly grasped by many of these young believers in Thessalonica and some believers even gave up their jobs depending on the charity of others for they thought that the “day of the Lord” was near and they should spend their time spreading the gospel. The Apostle therefore had to clarify what “the day of the Lord” meant in some detail. They had to be taught that they have not missed the “day of the Lord” and so we see wonderful passages of comfort and assurance in the exhortations found in the book of Thessalonians.

These words have great relevance for us today and for any time when believers have to live under **all** kinds of great persecution.

Paul had faced a great deal of persecution when he first preached the Gospel in Thessalonica. We can read the account of this in Acts 17. The church had faced much persecution and this was continuing. He therefore wrote quickly to correct the misunderstanding about the end times that had slipped into the church. He has to write in detail about the times of the end and teach them again about the man of lawlessness whose emergence would be a signal that believers were in the end times.

In chapter 2 of the Book Paul thanked God for the brethren in Thessalonica that God had chosen for salvation and through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth, and who will obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. So he stated that in view of these facts and their position in Christ: ***“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle
Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work”.***

THE TEXT

Verse 1. Note therefore that the Apostle emphasized that those called by God through the gospel and the teaching and proclamation of the good news have received a fabulous promise and can no longer say, ‘I couldn't help myself’. The Apostle gives additional reasons for this as he writes from the wicked city of Corinth where 1000 Temple prostitutes from the temple of the goddess of love Aphrodite paraded through the city every night to seduce the people into continuing a life of immorality and wickedness.

In pointing to the naked power of the Word of God to overcome evil, Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for him so that he would have success in his ministry of preaching the word despite the many evil doers that opposed the work of God.

He knew that the success of the ministry depended on the prayers of the people of God, and so he asks the brethren to pray that the gospel go out freely without any hindrance. Our prayerlessness therefore is a very serious matter.

Paul knew that he should model his prayer life on Jesus' life of prayer for He had taught His disciples that He did nothing without first going to the Father to discern His will for He said that He came to do the will of His father who was in heaven. One writer asks:

“What is prayer ? Prayer is the means by which man, despite his finite and sinful nature may communicate with the God who has reached out through Jesus Christ to redeem him. Prayer is the expression of complete fellowship between God and man in Christ. Prayer discloses our faith in the greatness of the God revealed in Jesus, a God who is so great he is willing to hear the prayers of his children.

Furthermore, his power is such that he is able to answer those prayers.

Prayer is the expression of man's dependence on God for everything in life so prayer must always be the dependent prayer of a child to his father”.

Another well-known writer and preacher tells us:

“The purpose of all faith is to bring us into direct, personal, vital touch with God. True prayer is an awareness of our helpless need and an acknowledgment of divine adequacy. For Jesus prayer was as necessary as breathing, the very breath of his life”.

The Apostle Paul believed so much in prayer that when confronted with spiritual warfare he would have to reach out to the most powerful weapon on earth against all circumstances, that is, he needed intercessor prayer, for prayer would sweep away resistance to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel would therefore spread rapidly.

The gospel would be glorified just as it had been glorified in them. It had been glorified in others for we have been told that when the Gentiles in Antioch heard the gospel they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord and the word of the Lord was spread throughout the whole region.

Verse 2. Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray that God would deliver him from the opposition of perverse and evil men.

One writer tells us that the word “perverse” describes men who have committed themselves and directed themselves and others away from what was good and right, loving error more than the truth.

“**Evil**” he tells us, means ‘malignant’, the Word used to describe Satan, “the evil one”.

Paul had faced many of these opponents of the gospel that had dedicated themselves to false doctrines. We today are facing the very same situation, and it is only the power of God that can restrain this evil, and change many to becoming reasonable and godly.

Verse 3. Paul insisted that there was no need to be tempted to become unfaithful for he was confident that God would guard, protect, and strengthen them. He had taught them that Satan would be going around as a roaring lion to threaten and to deceive, but God was faithful in everything and

that He would provide strength and protection so that he would be able to carry out his ministry successfully.

So note the message. You do not have to worry about Satan. You do not have to worry about God for God would never fail you but would deliver you. God has Satan on a leash.

Verse 4. In a sense, obedience will release the power of God on your behalf, says the Apostle. Paul was confident that the Thessalonians would be obedient to the word of God, all the words that the Apostle had reminded them.

He was confident that they would as he had taught them previously:

- abound in love for one another,
- walk in a worthy manner as befitting children of God
- abstain from sex immorality
- lead quiet lives minding their own business
- working with their hands,
- encourage one another and build up one another
- live in peace with one another.

They would be able to do this in the strength of God.

Verse 5. So the Apostle prayed that the Thessalonians pursue love and patience for they were essential for spiritual stability and strength. He prayed that God would direct the hearts of the Thessalonians into the love of God so that despite persecutions they were undergoing and their fears they would grow in the patience of Christ. They would therefore be able to stand firm holding fast to the love of God. Remember therefore that just as the Apostle needed the prayers of the saints, we also need the prayers of the saints. We should always pray for each other.

2 JOHN 4-11

The Book of 2 John it is to what John calls *“the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth”*.

There has of course been historically much arguments as to whether John was writing to an individual in what was likely to be the city of Ephesus, or given the tremendous persecution under the Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) was using a metaphor addressing the church and believers in the church.

The emphasis was certainly on certain doctrinal matters and John insisted that the Scriptures be observed closely and carefully. It focuses on protecting the fellowship from the enemies of the truth, and the Apostle even warned his readers against inviting false teachers into their homes and greeting them, for this would give people living around them the false impression that they had approved of their false teachings.

John stressed that he loved the church “in truth” and he insisted that all who knew the truth would do the same, for the truth was essentially expressed in the person of Jesus Christ, and so was to be highly prized for it had eternal significance.

This writing by John of course has run into tremendous problems and many scholars have rejected its teaching on the concepts of “truth” and “love”. Truth and love for John have the voice of God in harmony so that the character of the Christian would be well-balanced. There must be both truth as well as love.

We should note that there are only two kinds of perversions of Christian doctrine.

The first is the distortion of the doctrine of Scripture that the person, the Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who came from God into the world and became man becoming Redeemer and Savior. The incarnation of Jesus is therefore an essential doctrine of Christian faith and thus if someone refuses to believe this essential doctrine preached by the mighty apostles which placed it at the center of Christian teaching, then that person is not a believer even if he or she claims to be a spokesman of God. John in all his writings insists on the truth of this doctrine and describes anyone who disagrees with the doctrine as being a deceiver and an antichrist.

The other kind of error relates to a false idea of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ which holds the Bible is not an adequate revelation of God and that we need to say something else. This was a problem faced by the early church and it is before us today. One writer states:

“Someone with such a view may be very persuasive and sincere. He may be a very great personality, but this is the test: if he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ then he is not of God.

There are many people today who say that the teachings of the Scriptures are infantile. Modern man has grown beyond all this and can no longer accept these simplistic teachings of the Bible. The modern mind must find satisfaction in more scientific approaches. They cannot rest upon the simple things.

Do you see that that is another example of exactly what John is talking about here? Someone who goes beyond, departs from the revelation of Jesus, considering it too simple, and tries to add something to the teachings of the Word of God?”

THE TEXT

Verse 4. John was exceedingly happy for the record that some of the people in the church were walking in truth: truth which was the same as the Commandment from the Father. This introduces the idea of the Father’s command, for it is clear that Christians are not done with the commandments. The truth is truths the Father holds on to for it is part of His righteousness. He has provided Jesus who came to save men and redeem them and have the Holy Spirit actually write these laws of God on our hearts.

We are therefore instructed to do God as does for we had been given the righteousness of Christ.

Verse 5. John is likely still addressing the church as the dear lady, given the necessity of throwing the persecutors of the church off the trail. He speaks of the Commandment to love as being a new commandment, even though it was a commandment from the very beginning, namely, that we love one another.

Here we encounter the danger in a new theology, for what God has taught man has been something taught from the very beginning.

Here we are dealing with love which was taught from the beginning and which Cain very well knew when he wickedly killed his brother Abel. One writer comments on what John considered to be "love". He states:

"We must not.... think of the apostle John as the apostle of a weak, insipid, mawkish, cloying, sentimental kind of love. That is very evident from his first epistle. For example, in chapter 2 and verse 22, where he states, *"Who is a liar? Let he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ, he is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son"*. He does not hesitate to speak very strongly. In the 26th verse, he says, *"These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduced you"*. And in chapter 4 on verse 1, he says, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God because many false prophets are gone out into the world"*.

We therefore see that this person John who is normally called the Apostle of love denounces error greatly. Never forget that John and James were called by Jesus "sons of thunder" for they were radical and tough and clear in their language.

One writer tells us about one modern theologian who has significant views on this matter of God and of love: He states:

"She says first of all that, *"We do not really need God any longer"*. She said, *"To live, we do not need what has been repeatedly called God, a power that intervenes, judges, rescues, and confirms. The most telling argument against our traditional God is not that he no longer exists or that he has drawn back within himself, but that we no longer need him. We do not need him because love is all we need, nothing more"...* "Tradition", she goes on to say and I'm quoting her again *"has added Christology and ecclesiology to it; the virgin birth, the resurrection, the ascension, the Trinity, origin of sin and eternity"*.

This is an example of some of the modern theories but note that when the Apostle speak of love they do not speak of a sentimental love, but in fact go so far as saying that this 'love' God has and which we should have is very different for He states:

"Not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins", indicating clearly that loving involves propitiation accomplished by Jesus' death on the cross. Love requires Christ's sacrifice, and so we know that this is the nature of divine love. Real love then is not a painless and sentimental matter.

"Love" as described by modern thinkers is not all that we need for we are told that love is walking in God's commandments. That is precisely what true Christian love means. We really cannot say that we love God if we do not walk in the Commandments for love expresses itself in following the divine guidelines and so it is foolish for us to say that we love God when we do not keep His commandments.

As one writer stated, ***"Obedience without love would be servitude, the kind of obedience that a servant would render, something that is done for money, something that is done because of necessity, but not arising out of any relationship of love in the hearts. And love without obedience is not love, it is unreal."***

So obedience without love is just like servitude. Love without obedience is not really genuine love at all”.

Verse 7. There is now warning against the presence and dangers of false teachers. Now John focuses on the tares who do not know love and truth and so they will prevent and hinder the progress of the truth and will in fact substitute genuine love and truth with false doctrines.

Those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is a deceiver and an antichrist. But in truth it was the second person in the Trinity that has come “in flesh” and so Jesus will forever be the God- man truly God and truly man. This of course means that one must affirm the incarnation of the Lord Jesus and if one denies the incarnation as truthful, one as denying the revelation of God as reliable and truthful. If one denies the incarnation one is saying that

- There is no revelation from the Father,
- We do not know what God the Father is like
- We have no mediator in Christ
- There is no propitiation for sins that is sufficient for our salvation,
- Though the Apostles tell us to follow the example of the Lord we really have no example and we cannot therefore walk in His steps,
- We do not really have a High Priest to stand before us who understands us, and
- We have no redemption since His death would be an illusion.

The importance of this doctrine taught by God cannot be overstated. In the days of the early church there was a most dangerous doctrine called Gnosticism and this developed seriously and affected the interpretation of Christianity. It actually came close to victory over Christianity. One historian describes it and it is important that we understand what this doctrine stood for it has been resurrected in a modern form:

“The term ‘Gnosticism’ derives from the Greek word *gnosis* which means “knowledge”. According to the Gnostics they possessed a special mystical knowledge, reserved for those with true understanding. That knowledge was the secret key to salvation. Salvation was the main concern of the Gnostics. Drawing from several sources, they came to the conclusion that all matter is evil, or at best unreal. A human being is in reality an eternal spirit (or part of the eternal spirit) that somehow has been imprisoned in a body. Since the body is a prison to the spirit, and since it misguided us to our true nature, it is evil. Therefore, the Gnostics final goal is to escape from the body and this material world in which we are exiled. The image of exile is crucial for Gnosticism. The world is not our true home, but rather an obstacle to the salvation of the spirit. How then is the origin of the world and of the body to be explained? Now gnosticism affirmed that originally all reality was spiritual. The supreme Being had no intention of creating a material world, but a spiritual One. Thus a number of spiritual beings were generated. Gnostic teachers did not agree as to the exact number, with some systems positing 365 spiritual beings or “eons”. In any case, one of these eons, far removed from the supreme Being, fell into error, and that created the material world. According to one system, for instance, Wisdom, one of the eons, wished to produce something by herself, and the resulting “abortion” was the world. That is what the world is in Gnosticism, a ‘abortion’ of the spirit, and not a divine creation.

But since this world was made by a spiritual being there are still 'sparks' or 'bits' of spirits in it. It is these that have been imprisoned in human bodies and must be liberated through gnosis.

In order to achieve liberation, a spiritual messenger must come to the world, to awaken us from our 'dream'. Our spirits are 'asleep' within our bodies, being driven by the impulses and passions of the body, and someone must come from beyond to remind of us who we really are and to call us to struggle against our incarceration. This messenger brings the gnosis, the secret knowledge and inspiration necessary for salvation.....

Since Christ is a divine messenger, and since body and nature are evil, most Christian Gnostics rejected the notion that Christ had a body like ours. Some said that his body was an appearance, a sort of ghost that miraculously seemed to be a real body. Many distinguished between the heavenly "Christ" and the "earthly" Jesus. In some cases, this was coupled with the notion that Jesus did have a body, but that this was of a 'spiritual matter', different from ours. Most denied the birth of Jesus, which would have put him under the power of our material world. All of these notions are various degrees of what the rest of the church called 'docetism'- a name derived from a Greek word meaning "to seem". All of these doctrines embedded, in one way or another, that the body of Jesus appeared to be fully human, but was not".

Verse 8. They and us should engage in self-examination so that they and us would not lose the rewards for which they had worked. When they were seduced by false teachers they would lose their reward on the day of Judgment. We remember that Jesus had warned the church in Philadelphia to hold onto what they had so that one would not take their crown.

Verse 9. Anyone that did not abide in the doctrine of Christ did not have the truth but in fact was a transgressor, rejecting both the Father and the Son.

The Gnostics were clearly in this category for they had "gone beyond" what Scripture had taught. Note that the word "transgress" means going beyond a boundary. When the teaching of the Bible is supplemented by some 'key' to the Bible or some other new revelation you know that this is an erroneous doctrine that is being put forth and it is incorrect and destructive to the soul and to the rewards in the day of judgment. To depart from the Scripture is to put oneself in jeopardy.

Verses 10-11. It must be remembered that in those days there were no reputable places that travelers would stay in when they traveled from place to place. Inns often were terrible places and so traveling prophets and teachers of the Bible would have to stay in the homes of believers to be safe. But now the

Apostle is telling the brethren that if someone, that is, teachers who are unsound in the doctrines of Christ come to them, they should not be entertained or welcomed in the home, for that would give outsiders the impression that the believer supported that kind of false teaching.

This does not teach that one should not have an unbeliever visit them in their homes for this warning was really aiming at false teachers who were preaching the doctrines of the antichrist. Believers have to live in the world and associate with many persons with a view to lead them to Christ. But there should always be caution exercised in this regard.

This welcoming of Gnostics into the home and into the church was a very serious matter. It was not the idea of forbidding private hospitality, but involved rejecting the beliefs of the false teachers who claimed to be advancing in knowledge and thus being progressive thinkers.

Welcoming these kinds of people were really participating in their evil deeds.

CONCLUSION

The love of God that Christians speak about and teach about is a specific kind of love. It is not a kind of love that is a casual, not serious and lighthearted matter for it is defined by the kind of sacrifice that Jesus made on the Cross and that the Father made when He sent His Son into the world.

It is not the kind of love that the world understands for we are told that the natural man cannot understand the things of God. So our task is to speak to people about God and pray that the Holy Spirit will open the hearts and minds of persons to whom we are witnessing.

There are many variations in false teachings that are called Christian teachings. Cult teachings, pagan philosophies, mystery religions can be found everywhere. They all pick and choose various sections of the knowledge that go far beyond Christian boundaries. They have seduced many who think that they know the truth and that those who believe in all teachings of Scripture are simpletons. So we have to be careful. Many false teachers are eloquent, and skillful and have doctrines attractive to the passions of the flesh. They know how to promise attractive and easy sounding doctrines, but these are designed to capture the soul of men, deceive men, and destroy men. The false teachers make great claims but really are out to exploit men and live a lifestyle of pleasure and power.

Though we are the same as the people in the church to who the Apostle John addressed his letter, elect of God, we need to guard against false teachers and their false doctrines. True followers of Jesus must defend the truth at the risk of seeming to be intolerant and unloving.

If we do not we will be handing victory to Satan. So let us hold fast to God's love and bring people into the family of God so that they would appreciate and welcome the love of God.