

Session 6

An Exposition of I & II Thessalonians

I Thessalonians 2:19–3:8

Scriptures

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| <i>I Corinthians 9:19–25</i> | <i>Acts 1:8</i> | <i>I Thessalonians 3:4</i> |
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I Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

Paul reveals here not only what his great hope was for the Thessalonians but also the hope of himself, that those whom God has given him to care over would be found abiding in Christ at His coming.

This was the apostle's hope, and it would ultimately be his joy and crown of rejoicing at Christ's coming.

This complete salvation of God's people, therefore, will be the minister's crown. Thus, a day of victory and celebration when the labor it took to bring people to Christ, as well as help them remain faithful to Him, is rewarded by God in heaven.

This hope is what prompts servants of the Lord to abandon personal freedom so others might be saved—knowing that at Christ's return, if God's people are fully welcomed into Christ's presence, all the spiritual labor done in His name will have been justified.

The degree to which the apostle was willing to sacrifice personal freedom to *gain the more* unto Christ's name and to *save some* is recorded in 1 Corinthians.

I Corinthians 9:19–25 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

²⁰ *And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;*

²¹ *To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.*

²² *To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

²³ *And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.*

²⁴ *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

²⁵ *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

The effort to win others to Christ is likened to a great contest in which a man holds the hope of gaining a crown of victory for his efforts. Such games were common in Paul's time and can be likened to our Olympics, in which individuals train for long hours and remain faithful to their training for years for the chance to gain victory and notoriety. Yet all this extended energy is for a mere corruptible crown, one that will quickly fade and be forgotten.

The apostle, therefore, sought a different crown, one given by Jesus Christ at His coming that would remain and continue with him.

The Scriptures also list five crowns through which God will recognize believers for their faithful service in ministry. They are: the crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19); the incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25); the crown of righteousness (II Tim. 4:8); the crown of glory (I Pet. 5:4); and lastly, the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

Consider then, that if a man runs for an earthly crown, he runs for a perishing crown—but he who labors for the gospel and its extension labors for incorruptible crowns, which because they have as their source, God, will not fade away.

Few rewards in heaven can compare to that which Christ gives to those who have sacrificed their lives for the conversion of His people. Since it is a selfless undertaking, it will be rewarded with exceeding glory.

Similar to the Lord Himself, who died for others' sins and then was granted power and authority over all things, God will fairly compensate those who have forfeited much for others' salvation.

Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

God's judicial fairness demands that He rewards all that has been done in service to Him. Hence, all that was done to advance the Holy Spirit's cause will not be forgotten.

There is nothing that Jesus cares more for than the saving of a man's soul. It was for this purpose that He died, and it is still the primary purpose of His heavenly ministry today.

Hebrews 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Heb. 7:25

Wherefore he is able also - As he ever lives, and ever intercedes, he has power to save. He does not begin the work of salvation, and then relinquish it by reason of death, but he lives on as long as it is necessary that anything should be done for the salvation of his people.

Even if it is thought insignificant by human standards, whatever is done for Christians in Christ's name will one day be rewarded.

Mark 9:41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

Ministers of Christ also prove themselves to be of the Lord when His ministry becomes theirs, and their primary purpose for living becomes helping Christ save others. By taking on the care of Christ's people, they reveal the deep and sincere love they have for the Master.

I Thessalonians 2:20 For ye are our glory and joy.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 2:20

... the joy of a minister in the day of judgment will be measured by the amount of good which he has done, and the number of souls which he has been the means of converting and saving; 1 Thessalonians 2:19. It will not be the honor which he has received from people; the titles which they have conferred on him; the commendation which he has received for eloquence or talent, or the learning which he has acquired, but it will be found in the number of those who have been converted from the error of their ways, and in the evidence of the good which he did on the earth. And will not the same thing be substantially true of all others who bear the Christian name? Will it then be a source of joy to them that they were richer than their neighbors; or that they were advanced to higher honors; or that they had a more splendid mansion, or were able to fare more "sumptuously?" The good that we do will be remembered certainly with pleasure in the day of judgment: of how many other things which now interest us so much can the same thing be said?

The Scriptures state that *he that winneth souls is wise* (Prov. 11:30), teaching us that few things reveal divine wisdom more than when instead of seeking this world's pleasure and fading glory, men wisely choose to live their lives in pursuit of bringing others to Christ name.

Nothing is more precious on this earth than a human soul, and nothing more worthy to sacrifice for, than the sinner's salvation.

Revelation 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

Benson Commentary, Rev. 14:13

the words, τα εργα αυτων ακολουθει μετ' αυτων, properly signify, *their works follow with them*, or follow them immediately; that is, the fruit of their works; they reap this, in some measure, immediately on their admission into paradise. Observe, reader, their works do not go before, to procure for them admittance into the mansions of joy and glory, but they follow or attend them when admitted.

Though men can bring none of their earthly possessions when they enter Christ's presence, God will remember all the good works done in His name.

Thus, where as, evil men and their works will be burned, good men and their divinely inspired works will remain and, according to Scripture, accompany them when they depart from this earth.

It is a unique characteristic of christian ministry that Christ promises His followers that their fruit will remain.

John 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

Because Christ is eternal, He will eternally preserve the divine fruit His people bear. Even today, the fruit of the apostles and recognition for them remains in this world, but even more important than this is when a man's labor and the good works he has done for the Lord Jesus follow him into heaven.

This proves that not only will Christ's people share with Him in eternal life, but also the fruit they have borne in service to Him will be accredited to their account for eternity.

1 Thessalonians 3:1–2 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

²And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

Because Paul was unable to return to Thessalonica as he had hoped, he did the next best thing—he sent a *brother*, a *minister of God*, and a *fellowlabourer* of the gospel in his place.

Timothy, therefore, was purposed by the apostle to comfort and help establish the Thessalonians in their faith.

In Timothy also we observe the spiritual attributes necessary to assist others in Christian growth.

Timothy was a brother, one who, like the Thessalonians, had been begotten by Christ through his belief in the Savior and then confirmed to be a son of God by the possession of the Holy Spirit.

Timothy also shared the same love and affection for God's people as his Lord. This teaches us that none can comfort or help true Christians except those who are Christians themselves.

And Timothy was exactly this, as Paul refers to him in the book of Timothy as *my own son in the faith*.

Religious bonds are the strongest bonds when faith in God's Son and the Holy Spirit forms them.

True Christians also will bear no greater allegiance than to those who are also Christ's. Spirit is thicker than blood, and spiritual ties greater than earthly ones. So that when men share the same heavenly Father and are bound together by the same Holy Spirit, spiritual unity is at its sweetest.

Minister of God.

Christ purposed Timothy for Christian ministry. The title *minister of God* is a weighty one, yet due to his exemplary Christian life, Timothy deserved it. All true ministers have God's will as the reason for their appointment.

Ultimately, none can hold a position in the body of Christ without being ordained by God for it. Since God sets the members in Christ's body as it pleases Him, all offices in the body must follow His will. Understandably, it is the Lord who chooses men for ministry, and not they Him.

Just as the body of Christ and all who should fill it are part of a greater heavenly plan, so also are those whom Christ has purposed should lead men into a greater understanding of Himself, foreordained to do so. Jesus chose the twelve apostles and He, likewise, chooses those purposed to testify for himself today.

This is why every true minister has Christ's personal ministry as the reason for his appointment, since, it is He who places men in ministry and equips them with sufficient spiritual power and wisdom to be effective in it.

Ephesians 4:11–13 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

¹² *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

¹³ *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Eph. 4:11

He gave.—In the original “He” is emphatic—He and He alone, as the ascended Head of humanity. The word “gave,” instead of the more obvious word *set*, or *appointed* (used in 1 Corinthians 12:28), is, of course, suggested by Ephesians 4:8. They who are ministers of His gifts are themselves gifts from Him to the Church.

All true Christianity has as its single and most important source of unity, belief in the Son of God. Hence, what God's people need more than anything else to establish them in faith is a greater and more full knowledge of Christ Himself.

True spiritual unity and growth thus cannot be fully accomplished unless God's people are, by Christ's ministers, brought into a greater knowledge of the Son of God.

What men speak of most, they cherish the most. By this we can see the distinction between true ministers of the gospel and those who merely use God's name for their own personal self-advancement.

Acts 20:30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

It is the mark of spiritual imposters in Christ's church that their secret agenda is, though they come in Christ's name, to *draw away disciples after* themselves.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Acts 20:30

To draw away disciples after them.—Better, *to draw away the disciples*—those who had previously been disciples of Christ and His Apostles. This was at once the motive and the result of the work of the false teachers. The note of heresy was that it was essentially self-asserting and schismatical.

Ultimately, if men desire their own name to be glorified, they have no real relationship with the Savior.

It should be noted as well that the reason Christ imparts to His ministers spiritual power is solely for the purpose, of them being made credible witnesses for Himself.

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Fellowlaborer.

Those whom Christ has called to serve Him will, as in Nehemiah's day, be given by the Spirit a mind to work.

Nehemiah 4:6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

No ministry ordained by the Lord will disregard the great need to labor for the gospel. Like Paul, who when divine grace was shown him responded by laboring more than all those around him, so shall those whom Christ has ordained today labor mightily for the gospel's advancement.

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Labor is the result of sincere faith in Christ. Thus, if men do not labor and are unwilling to expend sacrifice for the gospel, it is hard to conclude that they possess any real or deep faith in Christ at all.

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

One of Paul's initial reasons for sending Timothy was so that the Thessalonians would not be moved from their faith because of the persecutions directed towards them. The main objective also for spiritual persecution is to produce spiritual apostasy as Satan persecutes the beloved primarily for the purpose of hoping to turn them against God.

This was done to God's servant, Job, and it is also the reason for affliction and persecution of God's people today. The devil knows that many will, when afflicted, be offended and depart from the faith.

Mark 4:16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, Mark 4:16–17
afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. As soon as any small degree of trouble comes upon them, and especially when there is a hot persecution of the professors of religion, because of the Gospel they have embraced; such hearers are stumbled at these things, and cannot bear the loss of any thing, or endure any thing severe for the sake of the word they have professed a pleasure in; and therefore, rather than suffer, they relinquish at once their profession of it.

Ask a man to endure long hours at work for his own gain, and he will gladly spend himself, but ask him to suffer for Christ's name and the extension of the gospel, and rarely will the response be the same. Yet he who will not deny himself for Christ can never be glorified with Him, since all Christianity demands that men, after being saved, must endure some form of tribulation (John 16:33; Acts 14:22).

Hence, all roads that lead to heaven will entail some form of persecution because of faith in the Son of God.

Acts 9:16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, Acts 9:16
how great things he must suffer for my name—that is, Much he has done against that Name; but now, when I show him what great things he must suffer for that Name, he shall count it his honor and privilege.

The greater the responsibility that Jesus gives a man to testify for the truth, the more vehemently sinners will prove themselves against him.

Yet, in the midst of religious persecution, it should not be forgotten that though Christ's enemies are numerous and the pain they seek to inflict is real, Christ (and the strength He imparts to His people) is greater.

Joshua was a type of Christ, so if we believe the Word of God spoken to him—that no man would be able to stand before Joshua all the days of his life—then surely the Son of God’s ministry exceeds this.

Joshua 1:5 *There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*

Because Christ is both with and in His people, no worldly force can overcome them. It is also never human strength that propels and allows a man to continue in the midst of persecution—but only the power of God’s Spirit. God is the strength of His people’s hearts, and time will prove that His presence is more than sufficient to sustain their ability to persevere.

Psalms 73:26 *My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

Benson Commentary, Ps. 73:26

My flesh and my heart faileth — I find, by sad experience, my own weakness and inability to encounter such temptations, and bear, with becoming patience and resignation, such troubles, as I frequently meet with; yea, I find myself a frail, dying creature, that shall shortly return to the dust. Both my flesh and heart, my body and soul may, and, unless supported by God, will soon fail. *But God is the strength of my heart* — I have found him so; I do find him so, and hope I ever shall. As if he had said, Though I have no strength in myself, I have it in God, my never-failing refuge, to whom I will trust as long as I live.

Practically, a man can possess a sincere love for God yet not perceive the Lord’s great power in his life. This is why the Thessalonians were urged by the apostle to continue in the faith regardless of the persecution. For He knew if they would not faint then Christ would not fail in strengthening them. Through their faithfulness, the Lord would prove Himself to be the strength of His people’s lives.

Romans 8:37 *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, Rom. 8:37

We are more than conquerors - We gain the victory. That is, they have not power to subdue us; to alienate our love and confidence; to produce apostasy. We are the victors, not they. Our faith is not destroyed; our love is not diminished; our hope is not blasted. But it is not simple victory; it is not mere life, and continuance of what we had before; it is more than simple triumph; it augments our faith, increases our strength, expands our love to Christ. The word used here is a strong, emphatic expression, such as the apostle Paul often employs (compare 2 Corinthians 4:17), and which is used with great force and appropriateness here

Through him ... - Not by their own strength or power.

The strength that lies in the Christian is that of his Savior. Hence, the power that strengthens those saved by Christ is His own.

Because Christ has overcome the world, His people have been given power to do the same.

John 16:33 *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, John 16:33

But be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.—The pronoun is strongly emphatic, “I have Myself overcome the world.” He speaks of the assured victory as though it were already accomplished. (See Note on John 16:11 and John 12:31; John 13:31.) Here is the reason why they should take courage and be of good cheer. He is the Captain of their salvation, and has already won the victory. The enemies they fear, the world in which they have tribulation, are already captives following in the Conqueror’s train. They themselves have pledges of victory in and through His victory.

I Thessalonians 3:4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

HELPS Word-studies on [tribulation] “*thlibō* (the root of 2347 *thlipsis*, reflecting an original *b’/bēta*) – properly, rub together, constrict (compress), i.e. pressed together; (figuratively) oppressively afflict (distress), i.e. like when circumstances ‘rub us the wrong way’ that make us feel confined (hemmed in); restricted to a ‘narrow’ place.”

Satan’s aim is to so apply so much pressure against the saints of God that they feel restricted and then fear that there is nowhere to turn for help or escape. Practically speaking, when men are spiritually attacked, they will often feel hemmed in and think that they have no where to turn for deliverance. However, no matter what evil powers arise against those called by Christ, the power of Christ is greater.

It was also the purpose of the Son of God’s ministry, that He would through the power of the Holy Spirit, bring healing and deliverance to all those oppressed and held captive by the devil.

Acts 10:38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Ultimately, it takes the Son of God and His extraordinary spiritual power to free spiritual captives of the devil.

I Thessalonians 3:5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, I Thess. 3:5

The tempter.—See Matthew 4:3. The word and the tense in the Greek imply, not only that it is his character to tempt, but that it is his constant *occupation*.

In a few short verses, the apostle used two titles to define his spiritual opponent: first it was *Satan* (I Thess. 2:18), and now it is *the tempter* (I Thess. 3:5). Both titles are connected to the subtlety of the devil. Satan tempted our first parents to sin against God, and it is always Satan who through subtlety still attacks their descendants today.

Satan’s subtlety is seen not only in his outward persecution of faith, but by the craftiness by which he turns men against the faith.

Thus, if there is no subtlety in directly tempting the Christian, there will be subtlety in how the devil moves others against him.

The devil’s primary power lies in the deceit of his tongue, and this is why it is so important that when confronting evil, the Word of God is brought into the battle.

God's truth is the only defense against Satan's lies. And make no mistake about it—the devil is a master of lying.

John 8:44 *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

He who abides not in the truth, has no truth in him. Such is the tempter's character, that he is so defiled that truth has no more any true relationship to him. Hence, the world of evil spirits is a world of liars and deceivers who fashion themselves also after the great deceiver.

I Thessalonians 3:6 *But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:*

Paul knew that the Thessalonians were continuing in the faith and had not departed from God through the spiritual characteristics they continued to evidence in their lives: (1) their *faith*, (2) their *love*, and (3) their *good remembrance* of the apostles. By these credible evidences the apostle knew that what had been purposed by the devil to discourage and turn the Thessalonians from the faith had failed.

This is also why when faith and love are evident in God's people today, we can know that they remain in fellowship with God and in harmony with His Son.

Fruits of the Spirit, which is also what faith and love actually are (Gal. 5:22–23), reveal that men are continuing to be led by the Spirit.

By also remaining thankful for spiritual leadership, we learn that God's people remain in subjection to Him, since the first thing apostates do when departing from the Lord is to separate themselves from the ministers the Lord has set over them.

Hence, if men retain good remembrance of those God has placed over them, then we can know that they remain subject to the Lord's will for their life.

I Thessalonians 3:7 *Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:*

When saints stand fast in the Lord, they inspire others to do the same. Few things also are more comforting to spiritual leadership than when those they have espoused to Christ prove themselves as true Christians by remaining loyal to Him.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Thess. 3:7

We were comforted over you - See the notes, 2 Corinthians 1:3–7; 2 Corinthians 7:6–7. The sense here is, that their steadfastness was a great source of comfort to him in his trials. It was an instance where the holy lives and the fidelity of a people did much, as will always be the case, to lighten the burdens and cheer the heart of a minister of the gospel. In the inevitable trials of the ministerial office there is no source of comfort more rich and pure than this.

I Thessalonians 3:8 *For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

For ministers of the gospel, their own happiness is greatly dependent upon the faith of those they oversee. So closely tied is the minister's life to God's people that he can only really live when faith, love, and spiritual service abound in the church.

Consider as well, that in Christ's body, when one member suffers, the entire body suffers. But the opposite of this is also true, when the faithfulness of one member is a great cause for rejoicing in another.

God's people are uniquely united through possession of the same Holy Spirit. Thus, the spiritual condition of one believer in Christ's church will directly affect all other members of the church.