

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE ONE

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes. 1:1-12

The opening of 2 Thessalonians is very much like that of 1 Thessalonians. In 1:1 and 2 Paul says, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This Epistle and the First Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians were both addressed to the local church in Thessalonica, a city of the Roman Empire in the province of Macedonia, north of the province of Achaia. This church was composed of all the believers in Christ in that city. Such a local church is of the believers and is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that such a local church is born of God the Father with His life and nature and is united with the Lord Jesus Christ organically in all He is and has done. On the one hand, it is of human beings, in this case the Thessalonians; on the other hand, it is in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ. The organic union in the divine life and nature is the vital base for the believers to live a holy life for the church life, which is the theme of the two Epistles to the Thessalonians.

In chapter one of 1 Thessalonians we see the structure of a holy life for the church life. This structure is composed of faith, love, and hope. As we shall see, 2 Thessalonians also has the same structure.

ENCOURAGEMENT AND CORRECTION

Second Thessalonians is a book of encouragement and correction. The young believers in Christ at Thessalonica needed further encouragement; they also needed some correction. Paul encouraged these believers in his first

Epistle. Nevertheless, in the second Epistle he gives them a further word of encouragement. While he is encouraging them, he also corrects them in certain matters.

Actually, 2 Thessalonians is more a book of correction than a book of encouragement. Paul was wise, gentle, and kind. Therefore, he does not directly give a word of correction. Rather, first he encourages the believers and then goes on to correct them. If we read this Epistle carefully, we shall see that a word of encouragement is followed by a word of correction. Then there is some further word of encouragement and after that another word of correction. This book, therefore, is composed of two sections of encouragement and two of correction, in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. In this message let us consider Paul's first word of encouragement to the believers at Thessalonica.

FAITH, LOVE, AND HOPE

In 1:3 Paul says, "We ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers, even as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all to one another is increasing." We have emphasized the fact that the basic structure of the genuine Christian life is constituted of faith, love, and hope. Such a life does not originate from the ability of the believers' natural being; it originates from the infusion of what God is into the believers. It is carried out by their sacrificial love toward their Lord, who loved them and gave Himself for them, and toward His members, whom He has redeemed through His death in love. This life lasts and stands unchanging by the sustaining power of the hope that looks for their beloved Lord, who promised that He would come to take them to Himself. Such a life is the content of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

In 1:3 Paul mentions the Thessalonians' faith and love. In the first Epistle faith and love are regarded as part of the structure of the believers' life for the church. Here, in the second Epistle, faith and love are growing and increasing in their Christian life.

In verse 4 Paul continues, "So that we ourselves boast in you in the churches of God for your endurance and faith in all your persecutions and the afflictions which you are bearing." The endurance spoken of here issued from the hope of the Lord's coming back and was supported by this hope. Such endurance of hope is always accompanied by faith. Hence, it says here "your endurance and faith." Both are needed in persecutions and afflictions.

SUFFERING FOR THE KINGDOM

In verse 5 Paul goes on to say, "A plain indication of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be accounted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which also you are suffering." God's judgment is righteous and just upon all men. It will be finalized in the future (Rom. 2:5-9; Rev. 20:11-15). How God deals in this age with different people is an indication, a token, a proof, of the future execution of His righteous judgment.

The believers have been called into the kingdom of God and glory (1 Thes. 2:12). To enter into this kingdom we need to pass through sufferings (Acts 14:22). Hence, the persecutions and afflictions are a plain indication of God's righteous judgment that we may be accounted worthy of the kingdom.

THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The kingdom is the goal of the Christian life. Today we are living in the church life with the goal that one day we shall enter into the kingdom of God. The New Testament emphasizes the cross, the church, and the kingdom. The cross produces the church, and the church ushers in the kingdom. As we are living in the church life, our goal is to enter into God's kingdom.

This goal is neglected by many Christians. If you were to ask certain Christians what the goal of their Christian life is, they would probably say that their goal is to go to heaven. This kind of answer is very poor. The church life does not usher the believers into heaven; it ushers us into the kingdom. Actually, the church life is preliminary to the

kingdom. It is a preliminary stage of the kingdom. This is the reason that, in a very real sense, the New Testament considers the church life to be the kingdom. Romans 14:17 says, "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Because Romans 14 speaks concerning the church life, the kingdom of God in this verse signifies the church life. According to Paul's understanding, the church life is the kingdom. Of course, the church life today is not the kingdom in full. Rather, it is the kingdom in a developmental stage, a preliminary stage. We are in this preliminary stage of the kingdom with the kingdom in full as our goal. We are proceeding from the preliminary stage to the stage of fullness. This is the correct understanding of the proper goal of the church life.

Many Christians, including us, are dull in understanding the genuine revelation of the New Testament. For this reason, though many read the Bible, they do not see anything. Their situation can be compared to that of the Israelites, who, in the words of Paul, have a veil upon them whenever they read the Old Testament (2 Cor. 3:14-15). Because they are veiled, they do not see anything when they read the Bible. Because many Christians are veiled, they do not understand what Paul means when he says that God has called us into His kingdom and glory. Some Christians interpret the kingdom to mean a heavenly mansion. According to their understanding, to enter into the kingdom is to go to heaven. They hold this concept of the kingdom because they are veiled. They read the Bible, but they do not see God's revelation.

In His mercy, the Lord has removed at least a great part of the veil from our eyes. We surely have seen something of God's revelation, and we shall not be cheated any longer. We know that to go to heaven is not our goal. There is not such a thing revealed in the Bible. God's goal is that we live a church life that will usher us into the kingdom. This means that we should live a life in the preliminary stage of the kingdom that will lead us into the full manifestation of the kingdom.

In 1:5 Paul speaks of being "accounted worthy of the kingdom of God." This implies that some believers may not be accounted worthy of the kingdom. In order to be accounted worthy of the kingdom, we need our faith to grow, our love to increase, and our endurance to be maintained. For the church life we need to have a life composed of the basic structure that includes a growing faith, an increasing love, and a lasting endurance. If we have such a life, we shall be accounted worthy of the kingdom of God.

In verse 5 Paul also tells the Thessalonians that they are suffering for the kingdom. This word corresponds to that in Acts 14:22, which says, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Paul admonished the saints to bear suffering because we need to suffer in order to enter into the kingdom of God.

GOD'S JUDGMENT

In verse 6 Paul says, "Since it is just with God to repay with affliction those afflicting you." This verse indicates that God is judging and that He will judge in the future. We should not think that God is not judging today. There may be times when it seems that our God is not active. For this reason, atheists may say, "Where is God? It seems to us that there is no God in this universe. If there is a God, then He must be sleeping or retired." No, God is now judging.

More than fifty years ago, I devoted much time to the study of the prophecies in the Bible. In particular, I paid attention to the prophecies concerning the return of the Jews to their own land and to the reformation of the nation of Israel. As I studied world history and observed the world situation, I wondered how it would be possible for the Jews, who have been scattered over the earth for centuries, to return to their own land and once again be formed into a nation. However, in 1948 the nation of Israel was formed and was even recognized by the United Nations. From that time onward, and especially since 1967, the Middle East has been the focal point of the world situation.

How happy I have been to see the fulfillment of prophecies concerning the nation of Israel! God is fulfilling prophecy. Furthermore, He is actively carrying out His judgments. Therefore, instead of being troubled by any kind of opposition, we need to stand with God, with the One who judges those who afflict His people. As Paul says in 1:6, it is just with God to repay with affliction those who afflict His people.

RESTING AT THE UNVEILING OF THE LORD

Verse 7 says, "And to you who are being afflicted, rest, with us at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power, in flaming fire." The Greek word translated "rest" also means relief, ease, repose, liberty. In this age the believers suffer persecutions and troubles for the Lord. At the Lord's coming back they will be relieved of their sufferings and enter into the Lord's rest and enjoy its liberty.

In this verse Paul speaks of the unveiling of the Lord Jesus. The Lord is here today; however, He is veiled. His coming back will be His unveiling. Although the universe is immeasurably vast in its dimensions, with the Lord there is no such thing as distance. He is everywhere. One day, at His coming, He will be unveiled, and everyone will see Him.

We thank the Lord that we are not shortsighted. Through His grace, we have both insight and foresight. We are able to see through the veil. Unbelievers, however, do not know what is behind the veil. But we, the believers, know that the Lord Jesus will be unveiled.

At the unveiling of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power, we shall rest. The time has not yet come for us to rest. Our rest will be at the Lord's coming, at His unveiling.

DEALING OUT VENGEANCE

In verse 8 Paul continues, "Dealing out vengeance to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." This verse covers two

conditions and two stages. It speaks of God's dealing out vengeance to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of Christ. Certain people do not know God; others do not obey the gospel.

There is no excuse for not knowing God. Some may say, "The gospel was never preached to me. I lived before the gospel was preached." Those who reason in this way will not be able to excuse themselves for not knowing God. According to the Bible, God is made known through His creation (Rom. 1:20). Furthermore, God is made known to man's conscience. Man can know God through creation and by means of his conscience. Our conscience tells us that there is a God. For this reason, no one can say that he does not have a way to know God. Anyone who does not know God will suffer punishment. Those who heard the gospel but did not accept it and obey it will also be punished. Therefore, God will deal out vengeance to two categories of people--to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel.

ETERNAL DESTRUCTION

Verse 9 continues, "Who shall pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His strength." Those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel will pay the penalty of eternal destruction. This is eternal perdition.

CHRIST GLORIFIED IN THE SAINTS

In verse 10 Paul speaks of Christ coming to be glorified in His saints: "Whenever He comes to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all those who have believed (because our testimony to you was believed) in that day." The Lord is the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). He has been glorified in His resurrection and ascension (John 17:1; Luke 24:26; Heb. 2:9). Now He is in us as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27) to bring us into glory (Heb. 2:10). At His coming back, on the one hand, He will come from the heavens with glory (Rev. 10:1; Matt. 25:31), and on the other hand, He will be glorified in His saints. For Him to be glorified in

His saints means that His glory will be manifested from within His members. It will transfigure their body of humiliation into His glory like His glorified body. He will be marveled at, admired, wondered at, in us, His believers, by the unbelievers.

From Colossians 1:27 we know that we have Christ in us as our hope of glory. This indwelling Christ is the coming glory. Christ will come from the heavens, but He will also come out from within us. Therefore, the coming of the Lord is both from the heavens to the earth and also from within us. For Christ to come from within us is for Him to be glorified in us. Christ is now within us as glory. But this Christ of glory is concealed in us; He has not yet been manifested. At His coming back, the Christ of glory within us will be glorified in us. This means that He will come out of us and will be made manifest from within us. Thus, His coming will be a marvel. This is the reason that Paul says that when Christ comes, He will be glorified in His saints and marveled at in all those who believe.

As believers, we all may have the assurance that we have Christ in us and that this Christ is the Christ of glory. However, our unbelieving relatives, friends, and neighbors do not know that we have Christ in us. But when Christ comes, not only from the heavens but also from within us to be manifested, then our unbelieving relatives, neighbors, and friends will marvel.

The Christ who is glorified in us will be marveled at by unbelievers. Someone may say, "Aren't you my son-in-law? What has happened to you?" Then that one may respond, "I testified to you a number of times about Christ living in me. But instead of believing me, you mocked me and despised me. But now you marvel because my Christ has come out from within me to be manifested in glory." One day this will be our situation.

We have Christ in us, and we are in the process of being filled with Christ. But our Christ is veiled, even to us. When the Christ of glory comes out from within us and is manifested, others will marvel at us.

Sometimes even we may find it hard to believe that the

glorious Christ is within us right now. Doctrinally, we may believe that Christ is in us. However, we may have some doubts. In the past I wondered if I really had Christ in me. I said to myself, "Is Christ really in you as the hope of glory? Look at how poor you are. It seems that you were better years ago than you are today." Perhaps you also have doubted that Christ is in you. But the day will come when the Christ in you, the hidden Christ, will be made manifest. That manifestation will actually be the glorification of Christ in us. When He comes out from within us, He will be marveled at by all the unbelievers.

WORTHY OF THE CALLING

Verse 11 says, "For which also we pray always concerning you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling, and may fulfill every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith in power." To call us into the heavens is not God's calling; it is to call us into His kingdom and glory.

The Greek word rendered "good pleasure" also means delight. The apostles prayed that God would fulfill the delight, the good pleasure, of the Thessalonians in goodness.

THE NAME OF THE LORD GLORIFIED IN US

In verse 12 Paul concludes, "So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." The grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord Himself within us as our life and life supply that we may live a life that will glorify the Lord and be glorified in Him.

In verse 12 Paul speaks of the name of the Lord Jesus being glorified in us and of our being glorified in Him. Such a glorification will be according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. This grace is something far more than unmerited favor. Grace is the processed Triune God becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit for our enjoyment. It is according to such a grace that the name of the Lord Jesus will be glorified in us and that we shall be

glorified in Him. As we enjoy this grace, it will cause the Lord Jesus to be glorified in us and us to be glorified in Him.

When we read these verses in chapter one of 2 Thessalonians, we see that they are truly a word of encouragement. In 1:1-12 we have encouragement concerning the basic structure of a holy life for the church life. We have encouragement for our faith, love, and hope.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TWO

A WORD OF CORRECTION OF THE MISCONCEPTION CONCERNING THE DAY OF THE LORD'S COMING

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes. 2:1-12

In this message we shall consider 2:1-12. Here Paul gives the Thessalonians a word of correction of the misconception concerning the day of the Lord's coming. Because the misconception corrected by Paul is common among many Christians today, Paul's correcting word is needed as much today as when it was first written, if not more so. Before we consider 2:1-12 verse by verse, I would like to speak briefly about the different schools of teaching regarding the Lord's coming.

THREE SCHOOLS OF TEACHING CONCERNING THE LORD'S COMING

Apart from teachings that are definitely heretical, there are among fundamental believers three main schools concerning the Lord's coming and the rapture of the believers. One of these schools is called the pretribulation school. This is the teaching that the coming of the Lord Jesus will take place before the great tribulation. The word "tribulation" is a special term in the study of prophecy. It denotes a period of time at the end of the church age. At the end of the church age there will be a period of seven years, the last of the seventy weeks prophesied in Daniel 9. Daniel 9 speaks of seventy weeks of years concerning the history of Israel. First we have seven weeks, then sixty-two weeks, and finally, after a long interval, the last week, the last seven years.

Just before the beginning of these seven years, a

powerful man will rise up--the Antichrist. Here in 2 Thessalonians 2 Antichrist is called the man of lawlessness. According to prophecy, this powerful person will restore the Roman Empire and will become the last Caesar of that empire. Then Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, will make a covenant, an agreement, with the Jews. This agreement will be intended to last for seven years. Because Antichrist will be so powerful, the Jews will be afraid of him; they will fear that he will persecute them in the practice of their religion. For this reason, the Jews will make an agreement with him, and in that agreement he will promise them freedom of worship. The Jews will be very pleased with this agreement, happy to have the freedom to worship the God of their fathers. However, after three and a half years, in the middle of the last seven years of the church age, the man of lawlessness will break his agreement with the Jews and begin to persecute them.

The last seven years may be divided into two periods, each three and a half years in length. In the Bible the second period of three and a half years is also called forty-two months, or 1260 days (Rev. 11:2-3; 13:5). From our study of the Bible we can say strongly and definitely that these last three and a half years will be the time of the great tribulation. This means that the great tribulation will be the second half of the last week; it will last three and a half years, or forty-two months, or 1260 days.

Many teach that the Lord's coming will take place before the great tribulation. However, when they speak of the tribulation, they usually mean the entire last seven years. According to their understanding, the whole of the last week of Daniel's seventy weeks will be the period of the great tribulation. They teach that Christ will come back to rapture the believers before this time of tribulation, that is, before the last seven years of this age. For this reason, this school of teaching is called the pretribulation school.

A second school is the school of posttribulation. This is the teaching that Christ's coming will be after the great tribulation. Those who teach that the coming of Christ will

be after the tribulation use many verses from the Bible as a strong basis for their teaching. Those of this school teach that Christ will come back at the very end of the tribulation. Therefore, their teaching is called the posttribulation school.

A third school of teaching, represented by Bible teachers such as Pember, Govett, and Panton, teaches in a more detailed way concerning the Lord's coming back than those in either the pretribulation or posttribulation schools. Those in this third school say that neither the pretribulation school nor the posttribulation school is fully correct. Rather, each of these schools is only partially correct. The teaching of the first two schools can be compared to a city map that shows only main streets, whereas the teaching of the third school can be compared to a city map that shows not only main streets but also small streets, lanes, and alleys. Therefore, the teaching of those in the third school is more detailed and more accurate.

According to the third school, Christ's *parousia* (presence) will probably begin a little before the middle of the last seven years and will last nearly to the end of this period. Christ will leave the throne in the third heaven and descend to the air concealed in a cloud and remain there for about three and a half years. During this period of time, a number of things will happen. The manchild in Revelation 12 will be raptured just before Antichrist begins to persecute every kind of religion, including Judaism and Catholicism, and he will exalt himself above every object of worship. The manchild will be raptured not to the air but to the throne of God. Furthermore, according to Revelation 14, the one hundred forty-four thousand will also be raptured during this time as the firstfruit, before the second half of the last seven years. We should not make the mistake of regarding the one hundred forty-four thousand in Revelation 14 as identical to the manchild in Revelation 12. These are two different groups of overcomers. The manchild and the one hundred forty-four thousand will be raptured to the throne of God. Then the Lord Jesus will

begin His *parousia*; He will descend from the throne of God to the air. It seems certain that the manchild and the one hundred forty-four thousand will descend with Him. Then at the end of the last seven years, the Lord Jesus will come to earth. Second Thessalonians 2:8 refers to this: "And then the lawless one shall be revealed (whom the Lord Jesus will slay by the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of His coming)." The Greek word rendered "coming" is *parousia*, presence. The appearing of the Lord's *parousia* will be at the end of the last seven years, after Antichrist, the lawless one, has been revealed.

THE LORD'S COMING AND OUR RAPTURE

Let us now consider 2:1-12 verse by verse. In verse 1 Paul says, "Now we ask you, brothers, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him." As in verse 8, the Greek word for coming here is *parousia*. Two matters are covered in this verse: the Lord's *parousia* (presence) and our gathering together (rapture) to Him.

The Lord's *parousia* will last for a period of time. It will begin with His coming from the heavens to the air (Rev. 10:1) at the time of the great tribulation, which will occur in the last three and a half years of this age, the second half of the last week of Daniel 9:27 (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 11:2), and it will end with its appearing, "the appearing of His *parousia*" (2 Thes. 2:8; Matt. 24:30). During the Lord's *parousia*, the majority of believers will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:17). "The day of the Lord" in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 refers, according to the context, to the period of time of the Lord's *parousia* (coming), in which the rapture of the majority of the believers will take place. Verse 3 tells us definitely that before this period of time Antichrist will be revealed to play the greatest role in the great tribulation (v. 4; Rev. 13:1-8, 12-15). This reveals clearly and definitely that the Lord's coming (*parousia*) and the rapture of the majority of believers cannot take place before the great tribulation.

NOT SHAKEN OR ALARMED

Verse 2 says, "That you be not quickly shaken in mind nor alarmed, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by a letter as by us, as that the day of the Lord is present." According to Darby, "in mind" (lit. from the mind) denotes "a steady and soberly judging mind." Paul did not want the believers at Thessalonica to be shaken in mind or alarmed with respect to the Lord's coming and our rapture. The phrase "by spirit" refers to the pretending of a speaking spirit that claims to have the authority of divine revelation. Someone may claim that he has the spirit to speak concerning the Lord's coming. Paul warns the believers not to hastily listen to such a one. He also warns them not to be shaken "by word, nor by a letter as by us." This may indicate that someone pretended to write a letter using the name of the Apostle Paul. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Brothers, if anyone by spirit, by word, or by a letter as from us, says that the day of the Lord is present, you should not listen to him. Do not be shaken, and do not be alarmed."

THE APOSTASY AND THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

Verse 3 says, "Let no one deceive you in any way; because it will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction." The Greek word translated "deceived" may also be rendered "beguiled," not only making a false impression, but actually leading astray.

In verse 3 the pronoun "it" refers to the day of the Lord's coming. This day will not come unless the apostasy comes first. This apostasy will be a falling away from the straight way of God's economy as revealed in the Scriptures. There is a strong prophecy in the Bible that before the Lord's coming back there will be a great apostasy among His people, a falling away from the path of God's economy. Even today there is a tendency among some Christians to leave the straight way of the New Testament.

Verse 3 also indicates that the day of the Lord will not

come before the man of lawlessness is revealed. This man of lawlessness is the Antichrist, as prophesied in Daniel 7:20-21, 24-26; 8:9-12, 23-25; 9:27; 11:36-37; Revelation 13:1-8, 12-18; 19:19-20. He will be the man of lawlessness, casting down the truth to the ground, changing laws, destroying and corrupting many to an extraordinary degree, blaspheming God, and deceiving men. Hence, the Lord will utterly destroy him, and he will become the son of destruction.

Verse 3 indicates strongly that the Lord's coming back will not precede the tribulation. Before the Lord's coming there will first be the apostasy and also the revealing of the man of lawlessness. This means that prior to the Lord's coming one matter--the apostasy--and one person--Antichrist--must appear first.

Paul told the Thessalonians that since the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness must come before the day of the Lord's coming, they should not be shaken by anything or anyone that would claim that the day of the Lord has already come. The apostasy must take place, and the Antichrist must be revealed. Antichrist will be fully revealed during the great tribulation. This indicates that the Lord's coming back will be after the tribulation, not before it. Second Thessalonians 2:3 is a verse used by those who follow the school of posttribulation to say that the coming of Christ will be after the tribulation.

Among the Brethren, the leading teacher of the school of pretribulation was J. N. Darby. Darby was an excellent teacher of the Word, and we have learned much from him. However, we do not follow him in his teaching concerning pretribulation. The school of posttribulation is more accurate. Concerning the Lord's coming, there is too much guesswork in Darby's teaching. For instance, he says that in Revelation 4 John was raptured and that this rapture was a type of the rapture of the church before the tribulation. According to Darby's concept, the tribulation begins in Revelation 4. Darby claims that in Revelation 4 John was a representative of the church and that his rapture indicates the rapture of the church before the

tribulation. In this matter Darby infers, or guesses, too much.

Benjamin Newton disagreed with Darby's interpretation. He pointed to the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians, where Paul says clearly that the Lord's coming will not take place unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness, that is, Antichrist, is revealed. As we have pointed out, this means that the Lord's coming back will be after the tribulation.

Neither those who hold to the pretribulation school nor those who follow the posttribulation school have seen the full truth concerning the Lord's *parousia*. Those who see one aspect of the *parousia* teach the pretribulation coming, but those who see another aspect teach the posttribulation coming. We consider the *parousia* as a whole and therefore do not stand with either the pretribulation or the posttribulation school.

ANTICHRIST IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD

In verse 4 Paul gives a further description of Antichrist: "Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or an object of worship, so that he seats himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself that he is God." This fulfills the prophecy concerning Antichrist in Daniel 11:36 and 37. This will take place in the midst of the last week as prophesied in Daniel 9:27.

The temple of God mentioned in verse 4 is "the holy place" in Matthew 24:15. Verse 4 indicates that the temple of God will be rebuilt before the Lord comes back. The temple was destroyed more than nineteen centuries ago. But this verse says that Antichrist will seat himself in the temple of God. Therefore, the temple must be rebuilt. The nation of Israel has been formed again, and the city of Jerusalem has been returned to Israel. However, the temple has not yet been built. Some Jews are deeply stirred concerning the rebuilding of the temple. One day, this temple will be rebuilt, and, according to the prophecy of Daniel, Antichrist will seat himself in it.

In verse 5 Paul says, "Do you not remember that, when

I was yet with you, I said these things to you?" Although Paul had been with the Thessalonians for only three weeks, he had spoken to them concerning these things.

THE MYSTERY OF LAWLESSNESS

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, "And now you know that which restrains, that he might be revealed in his own time." This verse indicates that some power hinders the revelation of the man of lawlessness, Antichrist. The words "in his own time" denote the time appointed by God, which will be the last of the seventy weeks, as prophesied in Daniel 9:27; 7:24-26; and Revelation 13:1-8.

In verse 7 Paul continues, "For the mystery of lawlessness is already operating; only there is one who restrains now until he comes out of the midst." The lawlessness that will characterize Antichrist is already operating in this age mysteriously. It is the mystery of lawlessness working today among the nations and in human society. Even now there is a tendency for lawlessness to be prevailing.

Antichrist will be the totality of lawlessness. No one can have unlimited power unless he is lawless. A lawful person cannot have unlimited power, because he is limited by the law. Those who are lawless, who are not limited by the law, but do whatever they please, may become very powerful. Hitler, an example of lawlessness, was such a one.

According to God's sovereignty, "there is one who restrains now until he comes out of the midst." This probably means that the restraining factor will be taken out of the way. Although the mystery of lawlessness is already operating, this lawlessness is at the present time restrained, restricted. But one day this restrainer will be taken away. We need to realize from the prophecy of the Bible that one day the restraining factor will be removed, and then Antichrist will be unrestricted.

In a democratic country such as the United States, even the President is limited by laws. He is not free to do whatever he pleases. But if the limitation of law were to be

removed, the one in power could become lawless and do whatever he wants. In such a case, the ruler of a country could become extraordinarily powerful. Today lawlessness is operating, but the restraining factor still exists. Because of this restraining factor, no one can be lawless and become so powerful. But when the restraining factor is removed, someone will rise up to be lawless and do whatever he desires. Then he will become extraordinarily powerful. That man of lawlessness will be Antichrist.

Verse 8 says, "And then the lawless one shall be revealed (whom the Lord Jesus will slay by the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearing of His coming)." This will be fulfilled in Revelation 19:19-20. This verse indicates that the Lord's coming (*parousia*) is hidden before it appears openly. This also indicates that the Lord's coming involves a period of time. It will remain in secret, and then it will appear to the public.

THE OPERATION OF SATAN

In verse 9 Paul says, "The coming of whom is according to the operation of Satan, with all power and signs and wonders of a lie." This verse reveals that the coming of Antichrist is according to the operation of Satan. The reason Antichrist will be so lawless is that he will be under Satan's operation. Due to the motivation of Satan, he will become extremely powerful. The operation of Satan is with power and signs and wonders of a lie. The entire operation of Satan to deceive people (vv. 9-10) is in its totality a lie, just as he is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44).

This operation of Satan is seen in Revelation 13. At that time, people will be deceived by lying signs and wonders. One of these signs will be that an idol, the lifeless image of Antichrist, will be able to speak.

NOT RECEIVING THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH

Verse 10 continues, "And with all deceit of unrighteousness among those who are perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved." A large number of people will follow Antichrist. They will accept his deceit because they do not receive the love of the truth in order to be saved.

In verse 11 Paul goes on to say, "And because of this, God sends to them an operation of error that they might believe the lie." Because the perishing ones did not receive the love of the truth, which God intended to give them that they might be saved, God sends to them an operation of error, an active power of misleading, that they might believe the lie.

In verse 12 Paul concludes, "That all might be judged who have not believed the truth, but have had pleasure in unrighteousness." The believers have the pleasure of goodness (1:11); the perishing sinners who reject the truth of God have pleasure in unrighteousness. To sin is a delight to them (Rom. 1:32).

We all need to be clear regarding the Lord's coming and not be shaken or alarmed by strange teachings concerning it. Today some teach that Christians will not pass through the tribulation, but will be raptured before the tribulation. This candy-coated teaching is not accurate. Do not listen to such teachings concerning the Lord's coming and our being gathered unto Him. The word in 2:1-12 is brief, but it is very sound and clear. I would encourage you to read the Life-studies on Matthew and Revelation for more details.

We should not simply know about the Lord's coming. We need to live a life to match the Lord's requirements so that we may be counted worthy to be in the manchild, or to be among the one hundred forty-four thousand, or to be the living ones who are raptured according to Matthew 24. Those believers who are watchful and ready will be raptured before the tribulation. However, those who are not watchful and ready will pass through the tribulation.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE THREE

A WORD OF CORRECTION OF THE MISCONCEPTION CONCERNING THE DAY OF THE LORD'S COMING

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes. 2:1-12; Dan. 9:24-27

In the foregoing message we considered the three main schools of teaching concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus, His *parousia*, and our gathering together, our rapture, to Him. These are the schools of pretribulation, posttribulation, and the school that considers the entire *parousia* in detail. We also saw that in 2:1-12 Paul gives a word of correction of the misconception concerning the day of the Lord's coming.

In 2:1 Paul speaks of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him. In 2:2 and 3 Paul tells the believers not to be quickly shaken in mind nor alarmed, neither by spirit, by word, or by letter, as from the apostles, that the day of the Lord is present. He also charges them not to allow anyone to deceive them. Then Paul goes on to say that the day of the Lord will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness, Antichrist, is revealed in his own time. At present, although the mystery of lawlessness is already working, there is a restraining factor, but one day this factor will be removed. Then the lawless one will be revealed. However, the Lord Jesus will slay him by the breath of His mouth and bring him to nothing by the appearing of His coming (*parousia*, v. 8). The coming of the lawless one will be according to the operation of Satan, with all power, signs, and wonders of a lie and with all deceit of unrighteousness among those who are perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth that they

might be saved. Because of this, God will send them an operation of error that they might believe the lie.

THE SEVENTY WEEKS

In the foregoing message we pointed out that the man of lawlessness, Antichrist, will be manifested in the middle of the last of the seventy weeks mentioned in Daniel 9. In this message I would like to give a further word regarding the seventy weeks in Daniel 9 in relation to Paul's word of correction in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

Determined upon Israel and Jerusalem

Daniel 9:24 says, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy." In this verse a week equals seven years. Seventy weeks, therefore, are seventy times seven years or four hundred ninety years. Daniel was told that these seventy weeks are determined upon "thy people and upon thy holy city." This means that the seventy weeks are related to Daniel's people, the children of Israel, and to the holy city, Jerusalem. This verse also speaks of finishing the transgression, making an end of sins, making reconciliation for iniquity, bringing in everlasting righteousness, sealing up the vision and the prophecy, and anointing the Most Holy. If we read this verse carefully, we shall see that it speaks of the ending of this age. The bringing in of everlasting righteousness refers to the millennium, to the thousand-year kingdom, when there will be righteousness on earth. Therefore, this one verse indicates that the seventy weeks will reach unto the end of this age and will bring in the thousand-year kingdom.

Unto Messiah the Prince

Daniel 9:25 says, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to

build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." The seven weeks in this verse denote forty-nine years. If you study the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, you will see that from the time that the king of Persia gave the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem unto the completion of this rebuilding was forty-nine years. Verse 25 also speaks of a period of threescore and two weeks, or sixty-two weeks. This is equal to four hundred thirty-four years. The first seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks yield a total of four hundred eighty-three years. This leaves the last week, a period of seven years, for the future. The first forty-nine years go from the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem to the completion of the rebuilding. The four hundred thirty-four years extend from the building of Jerusalem to Messiah the Prince. The last part of verse 25 says that the "street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." This refers to the building that took place during the first seven weeks, that is, during the first period composed of forty-nine years.

The Prince That Shall Come

Verse 26 says, "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined." The words "cut off" refer to the crucifixion of Christ, the Messiah. Christ was cut off not for Himself but for us. He was crucified for us.

The "people of the prince that shall come" is a reference to the people of Titus, a prince of the Roman Empire. In A. D. 70 the Roman army under the leadership of Titus thoroughly destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, the sanctuary. The history written by Josephus describes this terrible destruction.

Verse 27 says, "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall

cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." In this verse the pronoun "he" refers to "prince" in verse 26. However, this "he" will actually be the coming Antichrist. In typology, Titus was a prefigure of Antichrist. What he did in A. D. 70, Antichrist will repeat in the future. Hence, the prophecy here in Daniel 9 regards the two as one: the first, Titus, is the prefigure; the second, Antichrist, is the fulfillment.

The Antichrist, the one typified or prefigured by Titus, will according to verse 27 "confirm the covenant with many for one week." This covenant will be an agreement that is intended to last for a period of seven years. This seven years is the last of the seventy weeks mentioned in Daniel 9:24. In the midst of the last week, the last seven years, Antichrist will "cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." This means that he will stop the Jews from offering sacrifices on the altar in the temple and will begin to persecute every kind of religion.

The Church Age as an Insertion

From the time the commandment was given to rebuild the city of Jerusalem until the completion of this rebuilding was forty-nine years, or seven weeks. Then the time from this completion to the crucifixion of Christ was sixty-two weeks, or four hundred thirty-four years. After the crucifixion of Christ, the seventy weeks were suspended. This suspension will continue until the beginning of the last seven years of this age.

In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus said that because of His crucifixion God would give up the children of Israel. Therefore, their history was suspended at the cross, and from that time onward they have been forsaken by God. God has temporarily set them aside, put them away. The divine history then comes to the church. This means that the history of the church occupies the period of time between the end of the sixty-ninth week and the beginning

of the seventieth week. In other words, the church age is equal to the time during which the seventy weeks are suspended. We may also say that the age of the church, the entire history of the church, is an insertion wedged in between two parts of the history of the children of Israel.

This understanding corresponds fully to what is revealed in certain of the parables uttered by the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. For instance, the parable in Matthew 21:33-46 speaks of the transfer of the kingdom of God. In this parable the vineyard is the city of Jerusalem, and the husbandmen are the leaders of the Israelites. Matthew 21:41 says, "They say to Him, He will miserably destroy those evil men, and will lease the vineyard to other husbandmen, who will render the fruits to him in their seasons." This was fulfilled when the Roman prince, Titus, and his army destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

In the parable of the marriage feast the Lord Jesus says, "And the king was angry; and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city" (Matt. 22:7). These were the Roman troops under Titus which destroyed Jerusalem. Matthew 22:9 indicates that the preaching of the New Testament has turned to the Gentiles: "Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and as many as you find, call to the marriage feast."

The Seventieth Week, the Millennium, and Eternity

These parables indicate that after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, God gave up the children of Israel and focused His attention on the church. Therefore, at the time of Christ's crucifixion, the history of the children of Israel was suspended. This suspension will continue until the end of the church age, when God will once again visit the children of Israel. Then the last of Daniel's seventy weeks will begin. After this seventieth week, there will be the millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. The millennium will be followed by the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem. That will be eternity.

The Breaking of the Covenant

Antichrist will be extraordinarily powerful. For this reason, the Jews will be afraid of him and will be compelled to make an agreement, a covenant, with him that is intended to last for seven years. According to that covenant, Antichrist will promise the Jews that he will not persecute their religion. However, in the middle of the last week, the last seven years, Antichrist will break this covenant. He will force the Jews to stop offering the sacrifices, and he will seat himself in the temple of God, claiming that he is God. Speaking of Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, 2 Thessalonians 2:4 says, "Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or an object of worship, so that he seats himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself that he is God."

In the Bible the last of the seventy weeks is divided into two parts. What divides this week in half is Antichrist's breaking his covenant with the Jews, forbidding the continuation of the sacrifices, and seating himself in the temple. The Bible does not say much about the first half of the seventieth week; however, it has much to say about the second half. This second half is called "time, times, and half a time," that is, three and a half years; it is also described as forty-two months and twelve hundred sixty days (Rev. 11:2-3; 13:5).

THE LORD'S DESCENT FROM THE THRONE TO THE AIR

While Antichrist is moving on earth, the Lord Jesus will begin to move from the heavens to the air. We are not clearly told at what time the Lord will begin this move. As a result of careful study, I would say that this will begin very close to the middle of the last seven years. Revelation 12 indicates that the manchild will be raptured to the throne of God. From the book of Revelation we also know that the last three and a half years will begin after the manchild is raptured. At the time of the rapture of the manchild, the Lord Jesus will still be on the throne in heaven.

Furthermore, the one hundred forty-four thousand, firstfruit to God and the Lamb, in Revelation 14 will also

be raptured to the throne of God. These one hundred forty-four thousand firstfruit will not be taken to the air; rather, they will be taken to the heavens, even to the heavenly Mount Zion. The rapture of the firstfruit to the heavens is typified by the firstfruit in Exodus 23:19 being brought into the house of the Lord for God's enjoyment: "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God." According to Revelation 14, the harvest, the majority of the believers, will be left on earth to pass through the second half of the last seven years, which will be the period known as the great tribulation. Shortly after the manchild and the firstfruit are raptured to the throne, probably the Lord Jesus will begin His descent from the throne to the air, concealed in a cloud.

THE REAPING OF THE HARVEST

Where does 1 Thessalonians 4 fit into this picture? The rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 must correspond to the reaping of the harvest in Revelation 14. This harvest will be reaped, raptured, probably at the end of the last three and a half years. This means that the harvest will be reaped toward the very end of the great tribulation.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul says, "Let no one deceive you in any way; because it [the day of the Lord] will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction." After the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness, there will be the appearing of the Lord's *parousia*. The revelation of the Antichrist will be completed during the last seven years. This revelation of Antichrist must be first, and then there will be the appearing of the Lord's *parousia*.

In verse 8 Paul says, "And then the lawless one shall be revealed (whom the Lord Jesus will slay by the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearing of His coming)." This indicates that the Lord's coming (*parousia*) will first be hidden and then will appear openly. This also

indicates that the Lord's coming involves a period of time. It will remain in secret for a period of time, and then will appear to the public. The Lord's *parousia* will take place secretly during the last three and a half years. Then when the Lord Jesus slays Antichrist, His *parousia* will appear. Therefore, the Lord's *parousia* will begin with His coming from the heavens to the air and will be completed with its public appearing.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE FOUR

A FURTHER WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes. 2:13--3:5

In this message we come to 2:13--3:5, a portion of 2 Thessalonians that contains a further word of encouragement. In these verses Paul covers a number of very precious matters. In 2:13 Paul says, "But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." God loved us (v. 16), chose us from the beginning, and called us through the gospel (v. 14). He chose us unto His salvation, which is by sanctification of the Spirit, and He called us to the obtaining of the Lord's glory. Now He is taking us on with eternal encouragement and good hope in grace.

GOD'S CHOICE

In his word of encouragement Paul reminds the young believers of God's selection, God's choice. He tells them that from the beginning, that is, from eternity past (see Eph. 1:4), God chose them. It certainly is encouraging to know that before time began God chose us. This means that our being saved did not begin in time; rather, it began in eternity. In eternity past God considered us and selected us. From the beginning God chose us unto salvation.

SALVATION IN SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT

The salvation unto which we were chosen by God is salvation in sanctification of the Spirit. Sanctification of the Spirit is the divine transformation. By this we are

thoroughly saved from all old and negative things and made a new creation to obtain the Lord's glory.

Sanctification is a matter of transformation, and transformation involves a process. Now, as saved ones, we are all in the process of being sanctified, transformed.

We may use cooking to illustrate the process of sanctification. The church life can be compared to a kitchen. When God called us and saved us, He purchased us as "groceries" from a large "supermarket." In His "shopping" God called us. Now we are undergoing the process of being "cooked" in the "kitchen" of the church. This process of cooking is sanctification, transformation.

Because the church life is a kitchen for God's cooking, the church will not always have an appearance that is neat and orderly. This is usually the situation in a kitchen when a good meal is being prepared. Do not expect your local church to be perfect. A kitchen is a place of process. Because of this process, many things are not ready, but they are in the process of being made ready. Sometimes I am asked how I can tolerate the situation in the church. I reply, "Why should I not tolerate it? The church is a kitchen. Wait for another period of time and you will see the results of the work that is taking place now in the kitchen."

According to 2:13, salvation is in sanctification. This means that salvation does not immediately result in our going to heaven. No, God's salvation is now in sanctification. God is sanctifying us. This should remind us of Paul's word in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, where he says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly." At present we are all undergoing the process of sanctification in the kitchen of the church life. We know what it means to be cooked in this kitchen. However, those outside the kitchen do not understand what we mean when we speak of the process of being cooked.

Do not expect that everything in the church life will be marvelous and orderly. This is not the situation of any local church on earth. Furthermore, we should not think that the local churches at Paul's time were better than the churches today. On the contrary, because our cooking has

been improved, the local churches in the Lord's recovery

today may be better than the churches in Paul's day.

Often the messy condition of a kitchen indicates that an excellent meal is being prepared. The kitchen may be messy, but the food that is being cooked will be very tasty. If you want the food in your local church to be flavorful, you must be willing for your kitchen to be messed up.

Suppose you invite me to your home for a meal. If I see that everything in your kitchen is neat and orderly, I may be disappointed, for I shall realize that there may not be much to eat. But if I see that your kitchen is messy because of all the preparations for the meal, I shall know a feast is being prepared. When no one is cooking, the kitchen may be neat. But when a good meal is being prepared, the kitchen will not be so orderly. If everything in a church is neat and orderly, this may indicate that no one is doing any cooking. This means that there is a shortage in the process of sanctification.

I can testify that the kitchen of the church in Anaheim is messy. This proves that in Anaheim we are in the process of sanctification. God, according to His selection, has placed us into the process of sanctification. In the church in Anaheim we are experiencing a great deal of cooking; we are being sanctified and transformed. Sometimes when I am being cooked, I may wonder what is happening. Then the Lord reminds me that I have prayed for transformation and have ministered concerning it. In Anaheim I may say that I cook the elders, and the elders cook me. Furthermore, the elders are being cooked by the saints. Certain brothers and sisters seem to be especially given to cooking the elders. Actually the cooking in the kitchen of the church life is not done by any human hand. Rather, it is done by the Lord according to His wisdom and sovereignty.

God has selected us unto salvation in sanctification and not merely to have our sins forgiven. There is no need to be cooked in order to experience the forgiveness of sins. We simply need to pray, "Lord Jesus, I repent. I confess that I am a sinner. But, Lord, I believe in You, and I thank You for dying on the cross for my sins." A person who prays in

this way can be saved and have the forgiveness of sins. But this is not sanctification. After we experience forgiveness, we need to undergo the process of sanctification.

The Lord intends to sanctify us, to transform us. Transformation is a process that is not necessarily enjoyable. Nevertheless, we need to learn how to enjoy the Lord even when we are being cooked.

In verse 13 Paul tells us that sanctification is of the Spirit. Do you know where the Spirit is? You need to realize that the Spirit is in you to sanctify you. In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul speaks of sanctification, and this sanctification is of the Spirit. The indwelling of the Spirit is actually our sanctification. The Spirit indwells us with just one goal--to sanctify us, to transform us, to change us metabolically. This is sanctification of the Spirit.

BELIEF OF THE TRUTH

In verse 13 Paul also speaks of belief of the truth. In this verse the word "belief" actually means faith. The faith of the truth comes before salvation in sanctification of the Spirit. God chose us from the beginning unto the faith of the truth and unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit.

CALLED UNTO THE OBTAINING OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

In verse 14 Paul goes on to say, "To which also He called you through our gospel unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." The words "to which" refer to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, as mentioned in verse 13. In eternity God chose us unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, and then in time He called us unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord. Salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth are the procedures. Obtaining the glory of our Lord is the goal.

First God chose us and then He called us. He chose us unto the faith of the truth and unto the salvation in sanctification of the Spirit. Then through the gospel He called us unto the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus

Christ. The glory of the Lord is that He is the Son of God the Father, possessing the Father's life and nature to express Him. To obtain the Lord's glory is to be in the same position as sons of God to express Him.

I doubt that the majority of today's Christians understand what it means to be called unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 14 Paul does not say that God has called us unto the obtaining of forgiveness, justification, or reconciliation. He says that God has called us unto the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus. In John 17:22 the Lord said in His prayer to the Father, "And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one." The glory which the Father has given the Son is the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature (John 5:26) to express the Father in His fullness (John 1:18; 14:9; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3). This glory the Son has given to His believers that they also may have the sonship with the Father's life and divine nature (John 17:2; 2 Pet. 1:4) to express the Father in the Son in His fullness (John 1:16). I doubt that many Christians have this understanding regarding the glory of the Lord Jesus.

The glory of the Lord Jesus is that the Father has given Him the Father's life and nature for Him to express the Father. This is the glory the Son has given to us. This means that the Son has given us the Father's life and nature so that we may be able to express God the Father. What a glory! God has called us unto the obtaining of this glory, the glory of the divine life and the divine nature to express the divine Being. Although you may never have considered this before, this is the truth according to the revelation in the New Testament. Hallelujah for such a marvelous glory!

HOLDING THE TRADITIONS

In 2:15 Paul goes on to say, "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by our letter." We should not think that tradition is always bad. The traditions to which Paul

refers here are excellent. We need to stand firm and hold to these traditions.

ETERNAL ENCOURAGEMENT AND GOOD HOPE IN GRACE

Verse 16 says, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope in grace." According to this verse, what we have is not temporary and transitory comfort and strengthening, but eternal encouragement. This eternal encouragement is by the divine life. It is sufficient for any kind of environment and situation. Therefore, it is with good hope.

Eternal encouragement is related to the divine life. Whenever you are disappointed, you need to be reminded that the divine life is within you. If you consider even a little that the divine life is inside of you, you will be encouraged. Do you know what kind of life you have? You have God's life. The very life of God has been given to you. Eternal encouragement, therefore, is actually eternal life.

We can be encouraged simply by considering a little about the eternal life we have received. If you feel weak, be reminded that you have eternal life. In this way you will be strengthened and encouraged. This eternal encouragement is sufficient for any environment and situation. God has loved us and has given us eternal encouragement.

God has also given us good hope in grace. This hope is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27), which is the hope of the Lord's coming (1 Thes. 1:3), when we shall be either resurrected or transfigured into glory (1 Thes. 4:13-14; Phil. 3:21; Heb. 2:10). This good hope is in grace, and grace is nothing less than the Triune God processed to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. In this grace we have a good hope. We may say that grace is God Himself in Christ for us to enjoy that we may be sanctified by His Spirit and encouraged and established with eternal encouragement and good hope.

Some saints have said to me, "Brother Lee, we have heard your ministry for many years. It seems that actually

you are ministering just one thing. It is marvelous that you can give thousands of messages on the same thing." This is not my way of ministering; it is the biblical way and the way practiced by Paul. Have you noticed that in Romans Paul speaks in one way, but in 1 Corinthians he talks about the same matter in another way? Now we see that in 2 Thessalonians 2 he speaks regarding the same thing in yet another way.

I especially like the last part of chapter two, verses 13 through 17, for in these verses Paul presents important matters to new believers. His writing here is simple, but the content is profound. First Paul says that God chose us from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit. Then he says that God has called us through the gospel unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 16 Paul says that we have been given eternal encouragement and good hope in grace. Paul does not use the expression "eternal encouragement" in any of his other books. John speaks about the same thing, but he uses different terms. In 2:16 Paul refers to eternal life as eternal encouragement. In this verse the relative pronoun "who" may refer both to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God the Father, yet "has loved us and given us" is singular. This indicates that Paul regarded the Lord and the Father as one.

We need to learn to use the expressions Paul used, such as eternal encouragement. If you see that a brother is weak or disappointed, you may say to him, "Brother, have you not received eternal encouragement? Eternal encouragement is the eternal life that is within you."

Suppose a person who is very unhappy has a diamond in his pocket. Simply by looking at the diamond, he may be encouraged and become happy. We have the real diamond, and this diamond is the eternal life as our eternal encouragement. Do you realize that you have such a diamond in your pocket? Why, then, do you look at your troubles and sufferings instead of at this diamond? Oh, praise the Lord for the diamond of eternal encouragement! This encouragement is eternal life and good hope in grace.

ENCOURAGED AND ESTABLISHED

In verse 17 Paul says, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father, "Encourage your hearts and establish you in every good work and word." If we want God to encourage us, we need to encourage ourselves. If we help ourselves, God will help us. But if we do not help ourselves, God will not help us. If you are not willing to eat the food on the dining table, others cannot help you. But if you eat, everyone will be willing to help you. This is an illustration of the fact that we need to encourage ourselves and establish ourselves, and then God will encourage and establish us.

PRAYING FOR THE MINISTERS OF THE WORD

In 3:1 Paul says, "For the rest, brothers, pray concerning us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as it is also with you." For the word of the Lord to be glorified is for the divine riches contained in the word of the Lord to be released and expressed in the believers' living. We all need to learn how to let the word of the Lord run and how to cause the word of the Lord to be glorified in us.

Verse 2 says, "And that we may be delivered from improper and evil men; for not all hold the faith." The ministers of the word of God need such a prayer for them by the saints.

GUARDED FROM THE EVIL ONE

In verse 3 Paul declares, "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one." We are guarded by eternal encouragement and good hope (2:16-17). Only the eternal life can guard us from the evil one. The whole world lies in the evil one (1 John 5:19), but the divine life with which we have been born of God keeps and guards us from him (1 John 5:18, 4; 3:9). We have a part within us that has been regenerated, born of God. That part, which is actually the Lord Himself, always guards us.

THE APOSTLES' CONFIDENCE

In verse 4 Paul goes on to say, "We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that what we charge, you both are doing and will do." The charge here is like those in 1 Thessalonians 4:2-4, 9-12; 5:11-22; 2 Thes. 2:2, 15; 3:6, 10, 12-15.

THE LORD DIRECTING THE BELIEVERS' HEARTS

In verse 5 Paul concludes, "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ." The Lord directs our hearts by the leading of the Spirit, through whom the love of God has been poured out into our hearts (Rom. 8:14; 5:5). The love of God in this verse is our love toward God that issues from the love of God (1 John 4:19) that has been poured out into our hearts. On the positive side, we need to enjoy the love of God so that we may love Him in order to live for Him. On the negative side, we need to participate in the endurance of Christ so that we may endure the sufferings as He did to stand against Satan, the enemy of God.

In 2:13--3:5 Paul once again touches faith, love, and hope. This indicates that 2 Thessalonians is a continuation of 1 Thessalonians. This portion of 2 Thessalonians is a conclusion of Paul's writings to new believers concerning the basic structure of the Christian life for the church life. As we have pointed out, this basic structure includes faith, love, and hope. By faith we have been saved into sanctification. We have been called unto the obtaining of the Lord's glory, and we have eternal encouragement, which is eternal life, and also good hope in grace. Now according to 3:5, we need the Lord to direct our hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE FIVE

CHOSEN BY GOD UNTO SALVATION IN SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes. 1:3-5, 10-11; 2:13-14, 16

A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

The books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians contain a total of eight chapters. All these chapters are on the same subject: a holy life for the church life. Whenever we read 1 and 2 Thessalonians, we should not be distracted by other matters. No doubt, in the eight chapters of these two books a number of other points are covered. We need to be careful in our reading not to be distracted by these points. As we read 1 and 2 Thessalonians, we need to keep in mind that the central thought of these Epistles is a holy life for the church life.

This holy life for the church life is constructed of faith, love, and hope. The way to carry out such a life is to be sanctified wholly. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." If we would be sanctified wholly, we need to have our heart established blameless in holiness, and we need to preserve our vessel, our body, in sanctification and honor. Furthermore, all the parts of our being--our spirit, our soul, and our body--need to be preserved complete. This is to sanctify our entire being to have a holy life for the proper church life.

In 2 Thessalonians Paul repeats much of what he has said in 1 Thessalonians. Like a father with a loving heart

toward his children, Paul is repetitious. This is characteristic of parents, especially as they grow older. Again and again, they may say the same thing to their children. Therefore, 2 Thessalonians is a repetition and a further development of 1 Thessalonians. It is a repetition with warnings and corrections. In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul warns the believers not to be misled. He also corrects them in order to bring them back to the right track. Nevertheless, the main subject--the holy life for the church life--is the same in both books. Furthermore, in both 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians we see the basic structure of the Christian life, a structure that includes faith, love, and hope.

FAITH GROWING AND LOVE INCREASING

In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 and 4 Paul says, "We ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers, even as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all to one another is increasing, so that we ourselves boast in you in the churches of God for your endurance and faith in all your persecutions and the afflictions which you are bearing." In verse 3 Paul speaks of the believers' faith and love. He says that their faith is growing and that their love is increasing. In 1 Thessalonians 3:2 Paul says that he sent Timothy to establish and encourage the Thessalonians for the sake of their faith. From 1 Thessalonians 3:10 we learn that Paul was eager to see them again in order to perfect what was lacking in their faith. In 1 Thessalonians 3:12 Paul also urged the believers to increase in love: "And the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love to one another and to all, even as we also to you." In 1 Thessalonians 4:9 Paul goes on to tell the believers that they have been taught of God to love one another. Therefore, in 1 Thessalonians Paul was concerned that the believers' faith would be perfected and that their love would increase and abound. Now in 2 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul encourages the new believers at Thessalonica by saying that the apostles thank God because their faith grows exceedingly and because

their love is increasing. This indicates that, as Paul repeats the matter of faith and love, he adds a word of encouragement.

ENDURANCE OF HOPE

But where does Paul speak of hope in 2 Thessalonians? Paul's first reference to the believers' hope is in 1:4, where Paul says that he boasts of their endurance and faith in all their persecutions and afflictions. Hope is implied by the word "endurance." Their endurance issued from the hope of the Lord's coming back and was supported by it. Such endurance of hope is always accompanied by faith. For this reason, Paul speaks of their endurance and faith. In 2:16 Paul again speaks of hope: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope in grace." Paul, an excellent writer, could not forget the basic structure of his Epistles to the Thessalonians with the elements of faith, love, and hope.

HOLINESS AND SANCTIFICATION

In 1 Thessalonians 3 Paul speaks of holiness; in chapter four of sanctification; and in chapter five, of being sanctified. In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 he says, "That He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints." Then in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 he says, "This is the will of God, your sanctification," and in verse 4, "That each one of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." Then in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the holiness and sanctification spoken of in 1 Thessalonians for the carrying out of a holy life for the church life with the three elements of faith, love, and hope.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul gives a further word

concerning sanctification: "But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." God has chosen us unto salvation in sanctification, and this sanctification is of the Spirit. Paul's word about sanctification here implies all that he has said regarding holiness and sanctification in 1 Thessalonians. This means that it implies what Paul has said about having our heart established blameless in holiness, about preserving our body in sanctification, and about being sanctified wholly by the God of peace.

THE BRIDGE OF SALVATION

In 2:13 neither sanctification nor salvation is a simple matter. When I was young, I regarded God's salvation as something that was very simple. First I was eager to know definitely whether I had been saved. Eventually I came to know for sure that I had been saved. After that, I made salvation a major subject in my conversation with others. Whenever I met a person, I was eager to find out whether or not he was saved. Gradually I came to realize that salvation is not such a simple matter. Now if you would ask me if I have been saved, I would reply, "I have been saved, I am still being saved, and I shall be saved. Eventually, I shall be wholly, fully, and thoroughly saved."

Another way to ask about my experience of salvation would be to say something like this: "Brother Lee, you said that you have been saved, that you are now being saved, and that you will be saved thoroughly. Please tell us how much you have been saved. Also, how much are you being saved day by day? We know that you have been a Christian for more than fifty years. Please tell us how much of you has been saved and how much still needs to be saved." I use these questions as an illustration of the fact that salvation is not a simple matter.

If someone asks you if you have been saved and how much you have been saved, you should say, "I know that I

have been saved. However, I cannot tell you how much I have been saved. But I do know that I need to be saved much more. I have participated in God's salvation to some degree, but I need to participate in it to a far greater degree."

In 2:13 Paul says that God chose us *unto* salvation. This salvation has a long span. According to what we are able to understand, this span begins with regeneration and ends with glorification. Although we were fallen, sinful, and deadened, God came to regenerate us. Through regeneration, we began to participate in God's salvation. However, regarding this salvation we have a long way to go.

We may liken the span of God's salvation to a long bridge. This bridge of salvation begins in time and reaches to eternity. If you were to ask me where I am today on this bridge, I would have to answer that I do not know. I know definitely that I have not crossed all the way over this bridge. I know that I am somewhere on the bridge of salvation, but only God knows exactly where this is.

Although we do not know where we are on the bridge of God's salvation, we can know with assurance that we shall never lose our salvation or our regeneration. Once we have been regenerated, we are regenerated for eternity. Regeneration is a once-for-all matter. Regeneration can be compared to our birth as human beings. Once a person has been born as a human being, he will never cease to be a human being, a person. In the same principle, regeneration is a matter once for all, even for eternity.

THE DEGREE OF OUR SALVATION AND THE EXTENT OF OUR SANCTIFICATION

The degree of our salvation depends on the extent of our sanctification. The more we are sanctified, the more we are saved. Perhaps yesterday you were further along on the bridge of salvation than you are today. The reason may be that you lost your temper with your husband or wife, and this caused you to move backwards somewhat on the

bridge. You backslid and lost a little of your sanctification. Therefore, you are not as sanctified now as you were yesterday.

Suppose an old friend visits you and asks you to participate with him in a certain kind of worldly entertainment. If you accept his invitation, you will lose even more sanctification and move back farther on the bridge of salvation. However, if you refuse his invitation and instead preach the gospel to him and encourage him to become a Christian, you may recover the sanctification you have lost and even progress further on the bridge. As a result, you are more sanctified and more saved. The point here is that how much we have been saved is determined by how much we have been sanctified. We need to be impressed that God's salvation is not simple and that it is related to sanctification.

Suppose a young brother becomes weary of attending the church meetings. Therefore, one day instead of attending the meeting, he decides to go to the beach. The next time he comes to a meeting, he may feel that he is in death. The reason is that he has lost some of his sanctification. He did not preserve his spirit, soul, and body.

SANCTIFICATION AND JUSTIFICATION

Martin Luther fought a great battle for the truth of justification by faith. Because he was involved in this battle, we should not blame him for failing to see other aspects of God's full salvation. Luther taught that justification is by faith. According to this, if we believe in the Lord, we shall be justified. However, there is a sense in which justification is also a matter of degree. On the one hand, the Bible speaks of justification before sanctification (Rom. 6:19). But on the other hand, there is a sense in which sanctification comes first and justification follows (1 Cor. 6:11). In this sense, God's justification must go according to the standard of sanctification. If we are not sanctified, then we cannot be justified.

THE PROCESS OF GOD'S SALVATION

God's salvation of us involves a process. It has a beginning, and it will have a consummation. Once again, we may use human life as an illustration. Life begins at birth. But after birth there is a long process of growth. I have been growing in human life for many years, and still I have not yet reached the consummation. The principle is the same with God's salvation. However, many Christians regard salvation in too simple a way. Moreover, in systematic theology salvation may be presented as if it were simple and clear cut. But God's salvation is not simple, and in a certain sense it is not clear cut. On the contrary, it has a beginning, a process, and a consummation. Not even our human life is simple. Why, then, should we expect God's full salvation to be so simple?

We need to have the proper concept concerning God's salvation. If we have the right understanding of this, we shall realize that the extent to which we are saved is determined by the degree we have been sanctified. According to Paul's word in 2:13, salvation is in sanctification of the Spirit.

In our actual experience of God's salvation, we move back and forth on the bridge. Perhaps you yield to a certain temptation, and move backward on the bridge of salvation. But even then the sanctifying Spirit is working in you. As a result, that step backward may cause you to move even farther ahead than you were before. For example, a brother may lose his temper with his wife and exchange words with her. No doubt, this failure causes him to move backward on the bridge of salvation. However, when he repents and returns to the Lord, he will once again move ahead, further than he was before.

In our experience none of us moves steadily ahead on the bridge of salvation. On the contrary, we all move ahead in the way of going backward and forward. Even though this may not be clearly revealed as a doctrine in the Bible, we know from our experience that this is the way we advance on the bridge of God's salvation.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE SIX

CHOSEN BY GOD UNTO SALVATION IN SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes. 1:3-5, 10-11; 2:13-14, 16

The books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written in an elementary way because they are letters to young saints, to new believers. These two Epistles can be compared to writings that are for students in elementary school. However, even in elementary writings there may be certain basic elements.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul speaks of salvation in sanctification of the Spirit. Here we have three basic elements: salvation, sanctification, and the Spirit. All these terms refer to basic elements of God's salvation.

According to Paul's word in 2:13, God has chosen us unto salvation. The word "unto" means with a view to. Here Paul is saying that God has chosen us with a view to salvation; He has chosen us so that we may enter into salvation. In the foregoing message we pointed out that salvation here can be compared to a long bridge, to a bridge with a very long span. The bridge of God's salvation reaches from time to eternity; it brings us out of this present age into eternity. God has chosen us with a view of bringing us onto this bridge.

CHOSEN FROM THE BEGINNING

In order to understand these elementary writings to the Thessalonians, let us analyze some of the words and expressions used by Paul. Second Thessalonians 2:13 says, "But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from

the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." The phrase "from the beginning" in this verse refers to eternity past. God's choosing is His selection. God the Father chose us, selected us, in eternity past. Paul speaks of this selection in Ephesians 1:4: "According as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, in love." God the Father in eternity had a plan, a purpose. For the fulfillment of this purpose He has selected us. We all have been selected by God. We have been chosen according to His foreknowledge. Long before we were born, even before the foundation of the world, God the Father saw us and knew us. When God saw us, He was happy with us. He may have said to Himself concerning you, "I want this one for My eternal purpose."

Jacob and Esau

The case of Esau and Jacob is an illustration of God's selection. Romans 9:13 says, "As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." As God considered the twins, Esau and Jacob, He could say to Himself, "I don't like Esau, the first one. I am not happy with him. I prefer the second one, Jacob, the supplanter."

If you ask me to explain why God loves Jacob and hates Esau, I would have to answer that I am not able to explain it. I do not know why God loves Jacob, but hates Esau. Only He knows the reason. God has His own desire. The Bible tells us that God loved Jacob and hated Esau, but it does not give us the reason.

When I was young, I thought that God was unfair. It seemed to me that Esau was much better than Jacob. Jacob was a thief and a deceiver. Eventually, I had no choice but to accept what the Bible says regarding God's loving Jacob and hating Esau.

As those who have been selected by God the Father, we all are Jacobs. None of us is an Esau. Because we are Jacobs, we should not consider ourselves gentlemen. No, like Jacob our forefather, we are supplanters. But we are

supplanters who have been selected by God the Father in eternity past.

No Escape

I would like to say a word especially to the young people. Because you were selected by God in eternity past, there is no point in trying to run away from Him. In a very real sense, God is a great fisherman, and He has "hooked" you. God hooked you in eternity. Therefore, there is no way you can get off His hook.

In eternity past God spread many hooks attached to long strings. The hook on which you were caught was floating free until one day the hook came to you, and you were caught. Now you cannot get off the hook. God the Father has chosen you, and you cannot escape.

THE APPLICATION OF THE SPIRIT

After man was created, he fell and became corrupt. Therefore, God the Son came to redeem us and accomplish what God had planned. Following that, God the Spirit came to apply what God had planned and what Christ, the Son of God, had accomplished. This application is sanctification.

We may not have had any thought concerning God or any heart toward Christ. Nevertheless, one day we were caught by the Spirit, and the Spirit began to apply what the Father has planned and what the Son has accomplished. As a result, for no apparent reason, we came to believe in the Lord Jesus.

Even though our friends, neighbors, schoolmates, and associates may not believe in Christ, we cannot help believing in Him. I can testify of this from my own experience. One day I began to love the Lord Jesus. I have never seen Him, but I love Him. He is so good to me! Others may say that this is superstitious and regard Jesus as nothing. To them I would say, "You may not care for the Lord Jesus, but I love Him." This is not any kind of superstition. It is the application of the Spirit.

As we have pointed out, the application of the Spirit is

what Paul means in 2:13 by sanctification. When we receive the application of the Spirit, we are separated to the Lord

My friends and classmates could not understand what had happened to me, and I myself could not explain it. I only know that, at the age of nineteen, I suddenly lost my interest in other things and cared only for the Lord. I loved to pray, call on the Lord's name, read the Bible, go to meetings, and tell others how lovable the Lord Jesus is. Certain people wondered who hired me to do this. I told them, "I have not been hired by anyone. Rather, I am willing to spend as much money as possible to print tracts that I myself have written." This was my early experience of the sanctification of the Spirit.

When I was a young person, I loved to play soccer. One day, after I was saved, I was playing soccer. At a certain time, when the ball came to me, something within said, "Stop! Don't play any longer. Leave the soccer field." All the players were shocked; they did not know what had happened to me. Then I walked off the field and told them that I would not play soccer any longer. That was an experience of the sanctification of the Spirit.

Many of us can give testimonies concerning the Spirit's sanctification. Even though you may be very young in the Lord, the Spirit is nevertheless being applied to you. Whatever the Spirit applies to you is an aspect of your sanctification.

Because we have experienced the application of the Spirit, we do not have the freedom to do certain things that others are able to do. This is not a matter of teaching; it is a matter of God the Spirit living within us.

God the Father loves us and has chosen us. God the Son died for us and accomplished redemption for us. Now God the Spirit has come to apply all this to us.

I believe that many of the sisters can testify that being sanctified by the Spirit affects their shopping. Because they have been sanctified by the Spirit, their shopping has become different. As they are considering the purchase of a particular item, the Spirit within them may say, "Don't

touch that." The Spirit may say no much more than He says yes. No one teaches the sisters to change their way of shopping. The different way of shopping is the result of the sanctification of the Spirit. It is in this sanctification of the Spirit that we are saved. This is salvation in sanctification of the Spirit.

It is very easy for a husband and wife to exchange words. This is extremely common in married life. But I can testify that in the sanctification of the Spirit I have been saved from exchanging words with my wife. If I did not have the sanctification of the Spirit, I would probably exchange words with my wife every day. However, I can testify before the Lord that in my married life I have been saved in sanctification of the Spirit from exchanging words with my wife.

A SUBJECTIVE SANCTIFIER

Every day, even every minute, we are being sanctified. The One who sanctifies us is the Spirit. This is the reason the Bible speaks of the sanctification of the Spirit. All day long the Spirit, the third of the Trinity, is sanctifying us, applying to us what the Father has planned and what the Son has accomplished. Oh, we have such a practical, living, and subjective Sanctifier!

Even while we are sinning, the Spirit is sanctifying us. You may be committing a sin, but even then the Spirit is working to sanctify you. How gracious this is!

In Hebrews 10:29 the Spirit is even called the Spirit of grace. As believers in Christ, we all have received the Spirit of grace. The Spirit of grace sanctifies us unconditionally, that is, without any conditions or terms. The Spirit has been commissioned to sanctify us. He has been given to us for the purpose of completing the work of sanctification.

THE MARK OF THE TRIUNE GOD

Sanctification separates us unto God by putting a mark on us. This mark is actually the Triune God Himself.

Whenever we are sanctified, we are marked with the Triune God. As a result, others can see the Triune God in us. Furthermore, this mark is increasing and becoming more intensified. Year after year, this mark has been wrought deeply into my life. This is the work of the Spirit's sanctification. By the sanctifying work of the Spirit we are being saved. Furthermore, this is the way we live a holy life for the church life.

LIVING A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

Our Spirit Preserved

To live a holy life for the church life is to have our spirit, soul, and body preserved. Paul speaks of this in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "May your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." We need to have our spirit preserved from deadness. This means that we should be living in our spirit. We should contact God all the time and serve Him in a living way. We need always to have a direct sense from Him. Furthermore, we need to have a conscience that is without offense. This means that we keep our conscience, the leading part of our spirit, good and pure. To preserve our spirit is to keep it from deadness, contamination, and offenses. If our spirit is preserved in this way, we shall have a living spirit with a direct sense of God. We shall also have peace in our conscience. This is to preserve our spirit.

Our Soul Preserved

We also need to have our entire soul preserved. Our mind needs to be renewed, transformed, and sobered. Our will should be submissive and flexible, yet strong. Our emotion should always be properly adjusted. If our emotion is proper, we shall love what we ought to love and hate what we ought to hate. This is to have an emotion according to God's desire. If our mind, will, and emotion are in such a condition, our soul is preserved. We are not biased in any way, but every aspect of our soul is upright.

Our Body Preserved

We also need to be preserved in our body. In order to have our body preserved, we should no longer live by our old man. If we do not live by our old man, our body will be a slave to righteousness instead of a slave to sin. Positively, we preserve our body by presenting it to God a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). Then our body will even become a member of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15) so that we may live Christ, express Christ, magnify Christ. Furthermore, our body will then be the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit for God's dwelling (1 Cor. 6:19). God dwells in our body to move and to express Himself, to glorify Himself. In this way our spirit, soul, and body will be preserved in the Triune God. This is a holy life, and this is to be saved in the sanctification of the Spirit. This is the kind of life that is for the church life. The church life depends on such a holy life.

In the two Epistles to the Thessalonians Paul wrote to new believers about basic matters. I hope that we shall all pay our attention to what Paul says in these books so that day by day we may be sanctified and that our spirit, soul, and body may be preserved, with our heart, the acting agent and representative of the soul, established blameless in holiness. Praise the Lord that it is possible for us to live such a holy life for the church life!

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE SEVEN

A CONCLUDING WORD

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes. 3:6-18

In this message we shall consider 3:6-18. In 3:6-15 we have Paul's word of correction of the disorderly walk, and in 3:16-18, we have Paul's conclusion.

A CORRECTION OF THE DISORDERLY WALK

The concluding sections of this book surely sound like a word spoken to young believers. After speaking concerning profound matters in 2:13--3:5, Paul goes on to give a word concerning correction of the disorderly walk. In 3:6 he says, "Now we charge you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the tradition which you received from us." A disorderly walk is not only according to the flesh (Rom. 8:4), but is also against the building up of the church life (1 Thes. 5:11; Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 10:23).

It may seem that walking disorderly is a small point. Nevertheless, it certainly is practical. I believe that the disorderliness in Thessalonica came from the misconception regarding the Lord's coming back. Some believers thought that the Lord Jesus would be coming back soon, and therefore it was not necessary for them to work. Their concept may have been that as long as they had something to eat and could survive, that was adequate. Those who have such a concept become "superbelievers." They go above the level of proper spirituality.

Several years ago, a number of the young people thought that as long as they loved the Lord Jesus and were living the church life, it was not necessary for them

to

have a higher education. They thought it was adequate to do some kind of simple work. I came to know the situation and realized that this concept is absolutely wrong. We live in an age when it is necessary to have an education. In order to live properly in this age, we need a good education. Without the right kind of education, it would not be easy for us to make a living. I gave a strong word to the young people encouraging them to complete college and, if possible, to go on to graduate school. Furthermore, I encouraged them to study subjects such as medicine or law. I am thankful that this word was widely accepted by the young people. During the years that followed, many completed their education. Now they can testify how much help they received from that word.

Do not think that as long as we are spiritual, seek the Lord, and are for the Lord's testimony and recovery, there is no need for us to be prepared for work through good education. We live in an age of education, knowledge, science, and industry. If the young people do not have a proper education, it will be difficult for them to have a proper human living. Therefore, I encourage all the young people to gain a good education.

In verse 6 Paul charges the believers to keep away from any brother who walks disorderly. This indicates that Paul considers it a serious matter to walk disorderly, for this is a damage to the church life.

At this point I would like to say that it is better not to do anything with which the brothers would not agree. If you want to do a certain thing and the brothers do not feel good about it, you should hesitate and reconsider. The fellowship of the brothers is a protection and a safeguard. It will preserve you in the church life. Perhaps you think that you know more than the brothers. This may actually be the situation. Nevertheless, it is always safe to listen to the brothers. This is a good protection and safeguard.

Paul tells us not to keep company with one who is disorderly. If you keep company with such a one, you may encourage him to continue in his disorderly living. Staying

away from him will serve as a warning to him. It will also help to keep you from making the same kind of mistake.

Walking disorderly is upsetting to the church life. If we would have a proper church life, we need to learn to walk in an orderly way and to stay away from anyone who walks disorderly.

THE PATTERN OF THE APOSTLES

In verses 7 through 9 Paul reminds the Thessalonians that, in the matter of orderly living, the apostles were a pattern to them: "For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat bread as a gift from anyone, but in labor and hardship we worked night and day that we might not be burdensome to any of you; not that we do not have the right, but that we might give ourselves to you as a pattern to imitate us." The apostles were for the building up of the church in all things (2 Cor. 12:19). They were absolutely not disorderly among the believers, but were a pattern for the believers to imitate.

Because of the influence of the religious background, Christians often say, "We do not follow a man. We are following the Lord. You should not imitate any man. Instead, you need only to imitate the Lord." In a sense, this is right. However, it is not easy to follow the Lord directly, since none of us has ever met Him physically. Some who insist on following only the Lord may reply, "We should study the four Gospels and see how the Lord Jesus walked. Then we shall be able to follow in His footsteps." However, in many things related to our human living, there are not any footsteps of the Lord to follow. For example, He was never married. How, then, can you follow Him in your married life? We can follow Him indirectly by following other believers. There were practical reasons for Paul to charge the Corinthian believers to follow him as he followed the Lord (1 Cor. 11:1). Because Paul was an imitator of Christ, we should be imitators of Paul.

Of course, following another believer depends on the situation. Suppose an archbishop comes to us and tells us

to follow him. We would have to say, "Dear archbishop, we cannot follow you or imitate you in being an archbishop."

Many believers today are confused concerning whom to follow and whom not to follow, whom to imitate and whom not to imitate. But in the Lord's recovery we have been enlightened through the Lord's speaking. I would not encourage you to follow any particular person. Using Paul's word, I would encourage you to follow "the tradition which you received from us" (2 Thes. 3:6). By tradition Paul means teachings and instructions, given verbally or in writing. We cannot deny that in the Lord's recovery we have His speaking, teaching, and instruction. Although I would not ask you to imitate a particular person, I would urge you to pay heed to all of the speaking, teaching, and instruction you have received. These are the traditions from the Lord, and we should follow them. Because these traditions are free from the influence of the religious background, it is safe for anyone to follow them.

In this chapter, Paul encourages the believers not simply to follow his walk, but especially to follow his instructions, his teachings. This is to walk according to the tradition the believers received from the apostles.

THE MEANING OF WALKING DISORDERLY

Verses 7 and 8 indicate what it primarily means to walk disorderly. According to the context, to walk disorderly here is not to work and yet to still eat. If anyone does not work and yet eats, he walks disorderly. But because the apostles were not disorderly, they did not eat bread as a gift from anyone. Rather, they worked night and day in order not to be burdensome to the believers.

In verse 10 Paul goes on to say, "For even when we were with you, we gave you this charge, that if anyone does not want to work, neither let him eat." It is disorderly not to work and yet to eat. However, a brother would be walking orderly if he did not work and also did not eat. It is not working and yet eating that causes one to be disorderly.

Verse 11 says, "For we hear of some walking among

you disorderly, working at nothing, but busybodies." They were busy but "working at nothing," busy only with what was not their own business. Busybodies are nobody, and with them there is no Body of Christ. None of us should be busybodies. We all must learn to be busy, that is, to do our own work properly.

In verse 12 Paul continues, "Now such we charge and entreat in the Lord Jesus Christ, that working with quietness they may eat their own bread." Here we see that we should work without gossiping and eat our own bread. Do not invite those who do not want to work to have dinner with you. As long as they are not willing to work, you should not invite them to eat with you. To invite them to eat free of charge is to show love for them in a way that is not proper.

In verses 13 through 15 Paul tells the believers not to lose heart doing good; not to associate with anyone who does not obey the apostle's word in this letter; and to admonish him as a brother, not to count him as an enemy. The main point in this portion is that we all must learn to live in an orderly way. Let us walk orderly so that the brothers will agree with what we do.

PEACE FROM THE LORD OF PEACE

Verse 16 says, "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace continually in every way. The Lord be with you all." To keep the charge in verses 12 through 15 is to have peace from the Lord in every way. As long as disorder exists in a certain church, there cannot be peace there. In the church life we need to be at peace in everything, in every way, and with everyone. For this, we need the Lord of peace to give us peace continually in every way.

ENJOYING THE LORD AS GRACE

In verses 17 and 18 Paul concludes, "The greeting is by my hand, Paul, which is a sign in every letter. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." It is only when the Lord is enjoyed by us as grace that we can keep the church life from any kind of misleading and disorderliness. Both

to live a proper church life and to keep it in order, we need the enjoyment of the Lord as the supplying grace. Only by grace can we live a proper life for the church life.

A CLOSING WORD ON THE HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

We have emphasized the fact that the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians are on a holy life for the church life. In these Epistles the words holy, sanctification, and sanctified are used repeatedly. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 Paul says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." It is God's will that we be sanctified. In 1 Thessalonians 4:7 Paul goes on to say, "For God has not called us for uncleanness but in sanctification." Then in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul expresses the desire that the God of peace would sanctify us wholly. Verses such as these indicate that 1 Thessalonians is concerned with the believers' living a holy life.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 we are told that God has chosen us unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit. Here we see that salvation is carried out in sanctification. This means that to be sanctified is to experience God's salvation in a practical way.

Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians are concerned with such a holy life, a life that is separated unto God and sanctified wholly by God and for God. This holy life is for the church life.

Some may wonder how we can prove from 1 and 2 Thessalonians that the holy life is for the church life. This can be proved by the fact that both of these Epistles are addressed to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers on the subject of the holy life with the intention that they would live this kind of life for the church life.

The two Epistles to the Thessalonians also emphasize the basic structure of the Christian life, a structure composed of faith, love, and hope. Faith is the foundation, love is the building, and hope is the topstone. Again and again in these books, Paul speaks of faith, love, and hope.

He encourages the believers to be established in these things. He also wants to foster their faith, love, and hope and to encourage the saints to grow in these things.

In order to experience the carrying out of salvation in sanctification and grow in the basic structure of the holy life for the church life, we need the eternal life as the eternal encouragement. We also need the Spirit as grace, and we need the grace itself. Therefore, it is by the eternal life as the eternal encouragement, by the Spirit as grace, and by grace itself as the processed Triune God that we live a holy life for the church life. This is the revelation in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.