

## NOTES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF I THESSALONIANS - CHAPTER FIVE

CHAPTER FIVE moves finally to some 'musts' of ministry. The first concerns the certainty of Christ's return. Chapter 4 has already described just what will happen when the Lord returns to take both the dead and the living who trust Him to be with Him for ever. Chapter 5 deals with the question everyone wants an answer to - just when will this be? It will be - (5:1-10)

- like a thief in the night - just when people least expect

- like the onset of labour in childbirth - just when some are saying world peace has come at last

But as Christians we need not be taken by surprise because for us

- there is a light within, which turns night into day so we are not in the dark

- we are awake, alert and sober not asleep, dull and drunk; 'drunk', 'methusko', is in contrast to 'sober', 'nepho', which means 'having a clear mind'

- our hearts are protected by our faith in Christ and love for one another

- our minds are protected by our hope in all that He is and will be

- we are destined for salvation, to live, not to face His wrath; 'live' is 'zoe', the life of God.

Our response to this certain hope of Christ's return is to be to encourage and build one another up in Christ. 'Encourage' is again 'parakaleo', draw alongside to strengthen, and 'build up' is 'oikodomeo' which means to build a house. Much of our time is spent pulling one another down. Note that building up is to be 'one another' - a mutual help not a one way process.(5:11) Building up is very different from puffing up.(I Cor.8:1) But just how do we build one another up?

Paul described 8 steps

1. Appreciate those who labour over us.(5:12) 'Oida' means 'know, recognise' - realise just how valuable their service is because they do three things - labour, have charge and instruct. 'Labour' is the word Paul first used in 1:3, work till utter weariness, and then again in 2:9; 3:5. 'Having charge' in the New Testament is leadership by service not by domination.(Lk.22:25) 'Instruct' is 'noutheteo', 'put into the mind' by teaching not by telling off.

2. Esteem them very highly in love.(5:13) 'Hegeomai' means 'lead or suppose' and therefore describes the loving recognition of godly leadership. It is not blind submission to the authority of a man as if he were God.

3. Live in peace with one another.(5:13) 'Eireneo' means 'bring to peace'. There needs to be a constant process of bringing one another back to peace with God and each other. Peace does not last unless it is actively kept like a UN peace keeping force.

4. Admonish the unruly.(5:14) 'Admonish' is again the word 'noutheteo', 'put into the mind'. 'Unruly' is 'ataktos' which means 'without order', the person whose mind and life is in chaos,(II Thess.3:6) and whose influence can be very destructive. Truth will hopefully bring order.

5. Encourage the fainthearted.(5:14) 'Encourage' is 'paranetheomai' which means 'come alongside to tell a story', usually much more effective than outright rebuke. 'Fainthearted' is 'oligopsuchos' which means 'short of soul' and therefore easily misled and discouraged.

6. Help the weak.(5:14) 'Help' is 'antecho' which means 'hold firmly against' as in life saving a drowning person. 'Weak' is 'asthenes' which means 'without strength' and describes the person who of himself knows what is right but cannot do it.

7. Be patient with all men.(5:14) 'Be patient' is 'makrothumeo' which 'means long in passion or temper' and is obviously in contrast with short tempered which describes our normal way of being irritated with those who have not caught on to all that God can be in them.

8. See that no-one repay another with evil for evil.(5:15) This takes patience to a new level in our behaviour which can only be miraculous in which we reach out to the inner need that underlies the ugly act.(Matt.5:43-48; Rom.12:19-21)

Finally Paul moves to the equally important question of how do we build ourselves up. It will be futile if we build others up but crumble into ruins ourselves. Again there are eight principles which can readily be compared to the building of a house:

1. Rejoice always.(5:16) Christian joy, 'chara', is based on God's grace, 'charis', and is the realisation of our resources in Christ. The best quality building materials are available in adequate quantity. Use them to the full!
2. Pray without ceasing.(5:17) Prayer is a two way conversation in which God says the things that matter. The plans for the building are made available and explained by the architect Himself.
3. In everything give thanks.(5:18) Thanks, 'eucharisteo', receives the grace that God gives. Challenge by challenge we receive God's materials to build God's building. 'Everything' represents the unexpected difficulties of the building site, conditions and the team we work with. 'This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.' As in 4:3 we are reminded again that the will of God is about a relationship and an attitude to Him not an activity. Note too the repetition of 'always', 'without ceasing' and 'everything'. This is to be a moment by moment attitude.
4. Do not quench the Spirit.(5:19) 'Quench', 'sbennumi', means 'extinguish' as in putting out a fire.(Mk.9:44,46,48; Eph.6:16) We can extinguish the fire of the Devil's attack, but not the fire of hell. We must not extinguish the fire of the builder, the Spirit.
5. Do not despise prophetic utterances.(5:20) 'Prophetic utterances' are straight talking direct from God. 'Despise', 'exoutheneo', means to 'set at nothing'. The builder knows what he is talking about. Do not ignore His advice.
6. Examine everything carefully.(5:21) Check the plans, the advice, and the materials first. They are superb! Then check on the progress of the work.(I Cor.11:28) Has it even got started in me?(II Cor.13:5) Again notice 'everything' not just some things.
7. Hold fast to that which is good.(5:21)
8. Abstain from every form of evil.(5:22) We are to choose carefully between the plans and materials which are of God and those which are not. 'Hold fast', 'katecho', means to hang on tight. 'Abstain', 'apecho', means to run away from. Note that both words are from the same root, 'echo'. Notice too another 'every'. One bad choice can ruin a life's work as so many prominent Christian leaders know to their cost.

The letter concludes with a blessing and some instructions. As always with Paul the blessing is not mere polite words but a powerful summary of the whole message of the book.

- 'May the God of peace sanctify you entirely'(5:23) reminds us of what He is like and what His will is for each of us.(4:3)
- 'May your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame',(5:23) tells us again that we are the house He is building and that He wants to do a superb job in every part of our lives.
- 'At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ',(5:23) reminds us that there is a completion date on the house when the owner will return to take possession.
- 'Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.',(5:24) reassures us that the one we serve is both the architect and builder. Throughout it is His work. Trust Him.

There are three instructions:

- 'Brethren pray for us',(5:25) is not a plea for help on Paul's part because God was his help. Paul recognised that if they were listening to God about Paul they would have to listen to what God had to say about them.
- 'Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss',(5:26) would ensure that their 'labour of love' did not leave anyone out. Some emphasise that the kiss was to be holy rather than unholy!
- 'Have this letter read to all the brethren',(5:27) likewise extends that love to all, recognising that the most loving thing we can do for one another is to teach the word of God. The last verse sums up the secret of the Christian life, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ',(5:28) His work in and through us, not our performance.