

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

After explaining the miracle of God's word changing people in chapter 1, and something of the manner in which a faithful ministry should be conducted in chapter 2, Paul moved on to explore some of the deeper qualities and emotions in an effective ministry. Bringing people to Jesus Christ and on to maturity is not a mechanical operation in which we do the correct thing.

Conveniently Paul's 8 headings can be described with 5 E's and 3 L's

1. There must be **E**ndurance.(3:1,5) 'Stego' means 'cover closely' as in a roof to keep the rain out. The idea is similar to the helmet of salvation in Eph.6:17. There need to be no holes in the roof of our faith, or chinks in the armour of our knowledge of Christ.

2. We need to be **E**stablished in our relationship with Christ.(3:2,8,13) 'Sterizo' means to 'make fast' as in tying up a ship to the wharf or tying down a tent. Again we need to be sure that our faith is firmly anchored in Christ-centred truth not blown away by the storms of life.

3. It helps enormously to be **E**ncouraged (3:2,7). 'Parakaleo' means to 'draw alongside to strengthen'. Imagine learning to ride a bicycle with your father supporting you. This becomes especially important when we face affliction. 'Thlipsis' means 'under pressure' which may otherwise disturb or distress us. Disturb, 'saino', means 'wag the tail' and conjures up an interesting picture of a guard dog being roused!(3:3) Distress, 'anagke', means to 'press back' and creates an image of pressure backing us into a corner from which there seems no escape.(3:7)

4. Twice we are urged to **E**njoy our brothers' growth in Christ.(3:9) Joy, 'chara', is obviously related to grace, 'charis', and thanksgiving, 'eucharisteo'. We might compare this to children receiving Christmas gifts and, hopefully, remembering to say thank you before playing with their presents. Joy springs from knowing the grace of God for which we are thankful and involves deep emotion.

5. Paul prayed 'most **E**arnestly' (3:10). 'Huperekperisso' is a superlative. 'Perisso' is also used in 3:12 and means 'abound'. 'Huper' and 'ek' both take it to extreme, way over the top. Paul's whole being was wrapped up in his concern for those for whom he prayed.

6. There was a mutual **L**onging for Christian fellowship between Paul and the Thessalonians.(3:6) 'Epipotheo' is another superlative which describes yearning to the ultimate.

7. When he talked about really **L**iving if the Thessalonians stood firm, the word Paul used was 'zao' which means God's kind of living rather than man's for which the words 'bios', physical life, and 'psuche', soul life are used.(3:8)

8. The Loving Paul hoped would abound in the Thessalonians was again God's kind of love, 'agapao', rather than man's, 'phileo'. God's love is unconditional, unlimited and undeserved.(3:6,12)

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FOUR

4:1-8 Q.1 In what are we told to 'excel' first? How can we help other Christians to do better in their lives? What is the difference in practice between pleasing God and pleasing man? What practical example of God-pleasing living, sanctification, does Paul use? What is the 'vessel' he refers to?(II Cor.4:7) What effect will failing to please God in this respect have on those around us? Why is this issue so damaging on Christian witness and ministry? What is the 'will of God' for us?(5:18) How do we often mistake what is the heart of the will of God?

4:9-12 Q.2 What is the second way Paul wants the Thessalonian Christians to excel? How according to verse 9 do we know how to do this? How had this already been happening among them?(1:3-10) If they were already doing this for all the Christians in Macedonia, how could they excel even more? What does verse 10 have to do with loving one another? Does a 'quiet life' mean that we keep quiet about Jesus?(I Tim.2:1,2) Why should Christian workers work with their own hands? How will it be an expression of loving one another? What is the practical effect of failing to mind our own business? How will outsiders, unbelievers, be affected by seeing this kind of love to others?

4:13-18 Q.3 How without using the word 'excel' again does Paul continue his theme in the last part of this chapter? How does he comfort those who are mourning the loss of someone dear to them? Will Christians not grieve? What assurance should we have about the death of a believer? Why is belief in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus so important in our approach to loss? Who will rise first and why in this order? What will be the signal for these events to occur? Beyond Christ's return what does the future hold for Christians? How in practice should we respond next time to seeing someone mourn?