*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 17 - 22

Letters of Paul

**Monday, January 17 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2**

“Live in a way that pleases God”

Paul communicates in writing what he evidently would have preferred to tell the Thessalonians in person, had he been able to travel there at that time. It is notable that he affirms their present behavior and practices (which he instructs them to pursue with renewed vigor) rather than demand changes. The new information that he will communicate to them involves a matter not of conduct but of belief, that is, details about the coming of the Lord Jesus (see verses 13-18).

In verse 1 Paul does three things, all of which are meant to encourage them to live lives that are pleasing to God, that is, lives that reflect the character of and brings honor to the God to whom they have committed themselves. (1) He reminds the Thessalonians of the instructions they had received from him during his time in Thessalonica. (2) He affirms and commends them for following those instructions. (3) He exhorts them to do this more and more. In other words, it appears that he is affirming what they have done well, while making it clear that there is much more to do.

*May my life, Lord, reflect your character and bring you honor. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 18 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8**

“God’s will is for you to be holy”

*Holiness* means obedience to God’s will. While the term *holiness* is broad enough to encompass the full range of Christian behavior, Paul focuses on a single aspect of what it entails, namely, sexual morality. This topic would have been of particular significance for anyone recently converted from pagan culture, in view of the wide range of sexual mores and practices that existed in Greco-Roman society. Sexual fidelity was demanded of wives (in order to guarantee the parentage of legitimate offspring), but extramarital activity was tolerated and occasionally even encouraged among husbands.

For believers, sexual activity is not just an inconsequential private activity involving consenting adults; on the contrary, it has an impact on both one’s relationship with God and with other people; therefore, it ought to be exercised in a way that is respectful of both. Sexual behavior ought to be altruistic (a matter of giving to) rather than self-serving (a matter of taking from). It will thereby fulfill the purpose for which it was given by God to humanity.

*Strengthen me, Lord, to be holy, becoming more and more like Christ. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 19 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12**

“The importance of loving each other”

After signaling the topic of this section as *philadelphia,* love for one’s sisters and brothers in Christ, Paul employs a figure of speech in which a speaker pretends to skip over a subject (“we do not need to write to you”) that he does in fact discuss. It offers Paul a diplomatic way simultaneously both to affirm the Thessalonians for what they are doing well (vv. 9-10a) and to encourage them to develop in areas that need further attention (vv. 10b-12).

One area connected to *philadelphia* that needs further attention is the way that the conduct of individual believers affects the entire congregation. There seemed to be some who, in the public arena, were overly ambitious. Since aggressive ambition always draws envy and opposition, the fact that the ambitious person was also a Christian could easily bring negative public attention not only to the person but also to their fellow believers. Therefore, says Paul, out of *philadelphia,* make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands. This encourages the respect of unbelievers rather than their animosity.

*May our love for one another in our church family, Lord, continue to flourish. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 17 - 22

Letters of Paul

**Thursday, January 20 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14**

“What will happen to believers who have died”

Paul’s topic concerns those who have fallen asleep, that is, Christian brothers or sisters who have died before the return of Jesus. “Sleep” was widely and frequently used as a euphemism for death both by pagans and by Christians. In paganism the euphemism was viewed as a sleep from which there would be no awakening. They are here characterized by Paul as those “who have no hope.” For Christians, death was no less real, but the hope of resurrection meant that death was viewed not as a permanent state but as a temporary condition, one that might interrupt but could not terminate the life of a believer.

Indeed, it is precisely the resurrection of Jesus that provides the foundation on which Paul bases his encouragement. “Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then we must also believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” There is so close a connection between Jesus and those who believe in him that belief in his resurrection carries with it belief in the resurrection of his followers.

*I praise you, Father, that having raised Jesus, you will also raise me. Amen.*

**Friday, January 21 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18**

“We will be with the Lord forever”

The details Paul associates with the Lord’s descent are a collection of richly evocative images, but his emphasis in these verses is not on the details but on the outcome and result. (1) He assures the Thessalonians that contrary to what some of them may have thought based on their pagan upbringing, the dead are not lost forever. Both groups, the dead and the living, will experience the same reality. (2) The most important point to note in all this is the result: *All* believers in Jesus, whether alive or dead at the time of his return, will be with the Lord forever. The final destiny of Christians who died before Christ’s return is not death, but rather resurrection and eternal life with the Lord.

This truth is the source of the hope Paul mentioned in 4:13, in light of which he now urges the Thessalonians to encourage each other in the sense of giving comfort to those who mourn those who have died. Knowledge of the future ought to shape and influence how we live in the present, even in the presence of death.

*With confident hope, Lord, I know I will be reunited with those who sleep in you. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 22 1 Corinthians 15:12-20**

“Christ has been raised from the dead”

Paul here argues for the absurdity of Christian belief and practice if the bodily resurrection is not true. His main point is that if there is no coming bodily resurrection of all Christians, then Jesus himself was not bodily raised, and that makes Christianity futile. The upshot is that all of the following result if there is no bodily resurrection: (1) Both the apostolic preaching and the Corinthians’ faith are useless. (2) Paul and his companions are liars. (3) All humanity stands condemned because of their sins. (4) Those who have already died, including believers, are eternally lost. As a result, Christians are most deserving of others’ pity, since they believe in an empty promise.

But wonderfully none of this is true. Christ *has* been raised bodily and has thus set into motion an inexorable chain of events that will culminate in the universal demonstration of the absolute sovereignty of God. His bodily resurrection guarantees the future bodily resurrection of all believers, just as the “firstfruits” of a harvest heralded a much larger crop to follow.

*At the center of faith, Lord, is belief in your resurrection and in mine. Amen.*