

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **1 & 2 THESSALONIANS LESSON 2** **(Chapters 3-5)**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Welcome to our study of the Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. These letters deal with the Second Coming of Christ and problems related to it in the region of Thessalonica. In the first two chapters, Paul encourages these Christians regarding their conversion and faith, and reminds them to be faithful. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, Paul then offers these Christians some practical and much-needed exhortations. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 Paul said, “When we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.” There are times when, as part of the practical nature of Christianity, we need to be uplifted, encouraged, and strengthened in our faith. All of us get down at times. How do we get strength? Where do we find encouragement? There are several ways in Scripture that we can do that. We find strength when we arm ourselves with the whole armor of God. Paul said, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-11). When we put on the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation, when we take the sword of the Spirit, gird our waists with truth, and have the gospel of peace on our feet, we have great strength because God has given us all the tools, equipment, and armor we need. We simply have to make sure that we are wearing that armor every day.

Another area in which we can find strength and encouragement is in the Word of God. The writer of Hebrews, in Hebrews 4:12, said, “The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” God’s Word is alive. It is not a dead book that was written centuries ago, or that has no power today. It is living, powerful, and, just like a two-edged sword, is sharp enough to pierce to the soul and spirit of man. Thus, we find strength and encouragement through the Word of God. The Gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). But it also encourages us. In Acts 20:32 Paul said to the elders in Ephesus, “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” We find strength through the armor of God. We find both strength and encouragement in the Word of God.

But we also can find strength and encouragement through others, too. For example, we find great strength and encouragement in the life of Christ. In 1 Peter 2:21 we are told to walk in His footsteps. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul said, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” If we look to the life of Jesus, we can gain strength to deal with situations that arise every day. We gain encouragement from the fact that Jesus was willing to face the things He did for us, was willing to give up His place in Heaven, and was willing to come to Earth to live and die as a man.

We also gain great strength and encouragement from the power of prayer. Let's not underestimate the power of prayer in our lives. In Luke 18:1 Jesus said, "Men ought to pray always and never lose heart." What can keep us from losing heart and giving up at times? We have access to the throne of God through the avenue of prayer. In James 5:16 we read, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." What great encouragement we can gain by approaching the throne of God. Hebrews 4:16 says that we can come boldly to the throne of God where we will find grace and strength to help in times of need. We need to be encouraged and strengthened. Fortunately, God has given us everything we need to be strengthened.

But we must understand that the sufferings and trials that we face are a part of life. We must be faithful enough that we do not allow them to shake our faith. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 that these afflictions should not cause our faith to be shaken. Temptations are real, and will occur. We must be sure that our faith is strong enough that they cannot move us. We must realize that such things are a part of Christianity. If we will look upon them as a joy, then they will not move us. James 1:2 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials." James 1:12 says that we will receive the crown of life if we endure these temptations. There is a great deal of wisdom to be found in Psalm 119:67,71 regarding the value of trials: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.... It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." There is inherent value to be found in trials. They cause us to ask, "What is really important?" When we face trials related to our health, or trials related to sin, or trials related to relationships with others, they cause us to ponder what is really important in life. They cause us to carry out introspection in our lives to see if we are living the way we ought to be living. How can our trials shake our faith if we are not careful? If we are not careful, they might shake our faith in the existence of God. We might say, "God would not allow this to happen if He existed." But "the fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1). As Christians, we need to realize that trials are a part of life. But we have help in our trials. In 1 Peter 5:7 we are told, "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." Our trials might also shake us by weakening our resistance to sin. In Genesis 3 we see Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It's a place of bliss and happiness. But they were shaken by the devil's words. Let's not let that happen to us so that our resistance to sin is weakened. We must realize that these things will happen, and that knowing this ahead of time will help us deal with them.

Paul then says to the Christians in Thessalonica, "If you are going to be victorious so that you win over your trials and temptations, you must realize the tempter and his temptations." Paul said that he was writing lest somehow the tempter had tempted them and had caused his work to be in vain. Satan is the one behind the temptations, and is the one who is trying to make us fall. From the beginning, he has been luring men away from God's will. In Genesis 3 he asked, "Did God tell you that you could not eat of the tree?" He then changed that to say, "You will not die." Jesus said in John 8:44 that from the beginning the devil had been a liar and the father of lies. We must not allow him to tempt us with lies.

Another way that Satan tries to tempt us is to place every kind of lust before our eyes to tempt our desires and passions. The Bible says that if we know that, then our path will be secured. If we know what Satan is doing, and if we are willing to fight him, that is a big deal for us. In 1 John 2:15-17 we are told not to get caught up in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The devil will put those before us in order to tempt us and lure us. But we must not give in. We must stay away from those things. Satan places those things in front of us to lure us, and causes us at times to be filled with the pride of life (1 Jn. 2:16). Sometimes he causes us to think that we are bigger than God, that we can do

more than God, or that we do not need God's help because we can stand on our own. When we believe those things, we are destined to fall. We must realize that Satan is actively trying to lure people away from God, and if we are not careful we can give in to his temptations. One of those is the lust of the flesh. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 Paul offers a practical principle, telling them that they must live by faith. This means that we must live in purity. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 we read, "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality." The key word in that sentence is "abstain." We are not to flirt with or get close to such things. Christians abstain from sexual immorality. Why? Because sexual immorality is one of the things mentioned in Scripture that God hates. He clearly has condemned it. Think about what happened to the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. When God sent angels there, the people even tried to have relations with them. God sent Lot and his family out, and then burned the cities with fire and brimstone. God was very angry with the people's sins in those cities. In 1 Peter 2:11 we read, "I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." What is the problem with fleshly lusts? They put our souls at war with God, and at war with what we know we should be doing. They put our souls at war with the truth, and in alliance with sin. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 the Bible says that certain people will not enter the kingdom of Heaven. Among those are the sexually immoral, homosexuals, idolaters, and the ungodly. If we are going to live by faith, we must live in purity.

Then, in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 we learn that if we are going to be faithful to God, we must walk properly toward those who are outside. Part of our responsibility is to be a good example to the world. We must walk properly toward those who are outside. How do we do that? By shining our lights. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." We must walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7). God is the light, and Jesus is the light (Jn. 8:12). Thus, to be a light to the world, we must follow the teaching and example of Jesus. We must walk in His footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21). We must attempt—every day and in every situation—to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Then, people can see Jesus living in us (Acts 4:13).

At this point in the Book of 1 Thessalonians, we see an interjection—beginning in chapter 4 verse 13, and going through chapter five, verse 11—regarding the Second Coming of Christ. Chapter 4 deals with its nature. Chapter 5 (verses 1-11) deals with its timing. For this lesson, since we are dealing with practical principles about walking in the faith, we will move ahead to chapter 5 verse 12 where Paul begins offering encouraging principles and guidelines regarding how to stay faithful in view of the Second Coming. In our next lesson we will deal with 1 Thessalonians 4:13 through 1 Thessalonians 5:11, which deals with the nature and timing of the Second Coming. But for now, in chapter 5 verses 12 and 13 Paul encourages Christians to respect those who are over them, and to give such individuals their due honor and glory. He wants Christians to be faithful to the elders of the local congregation. Our responsibility to the congregation and to God is to obey those who are over us, who lead us, and who guide us in the Lord. Hebrews 13:17 clearly says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls." Thus, our responsibility as Christians is first to submit to God and His Word. Then, in matters relating to carrying out God's plan of action for the local congregation (not in matters of doctrine, because Jesus has all authority in that realm), we are to be amenable to elders and allow them to lead us (1 Pet. 5), and we must submit to them (Heb. 13:17). If we fail to do so, then we are failing to be obedient to the will of God.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:15 Paul then says that another practical principle for Christian living: "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all." We are not to take vengeance on anyone (Rom. 12:17-21). "Ven-

geance is Mine,' says the Lord. 'I will repay.' " "If your brother wants to take your coat, give him your cloak also; go the extra mile," Jesus said in Matthew 5:39. We must not return evil for evil. Instead we must return good for evil. We must do good to those who despitefully use us, hate us, and who do not listen to the cause of Christ—in hopes that our good will weaken their spirits, and weaken their resistance to the Gospel, so that they will want to accept the Gospel of Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16 Paul offers another practical principle—"Rejoice always." If we are going to make it through this life, we must have an attitude of rejoicing. That is the outlook a Christian ought to have. This does not mean that everything will make us happy, or that we will be glad about everything. But we can have joy because we know we are right with God. In Philippians 4:4 Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" The psalmist said, "Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, not stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But happy is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord" (Ps. 1:1-2). Our happiness is in doing the will of the Lord. If we are doing that, no matter what the circumstances might be, we can find real joy. Think of Paul. In Acts 16:25 we see that Paul and Silas are in prison. What are they doing? Are they down? Are they depressed in that deep, dark dungeon? Are they throwing in the towel and giving up? Absolutely not! They are praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners are listening to them. They realized that, as Philippians 1:21 says, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." That is reason to always rejoice. If we are living for Christ, no matter what happens, it is a gain. We can smile, have joy, and live faithfully, knowing that we have such a hope.

Then Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." This does not mean that everything we do in life is a prayer. But it does mean that there ought never to be a time when we cannot pray to God. Mark 1:35 says of Jesus' prayer life, "In the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." What made Jesus such a powerful Man of God? There were many things, but one was His prayer life. James 5:16 tells us, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Think about men like Daniel, Nehemiah, or Ezra. What made them great men of God? As Nehemiah was about to go in and talk to the king (knowing that his life was hanging in the balance), what did he do? He said a prayer to God to ask Him for help. Daniel prayed to God. Ezra prayed to God. These were men of prayer. In every situation they looked to God for help. In Luke 18:1 Jesus said, "Men ought to pray always, and never lose heart." Let's realize the inherent value of prayer.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Paul said, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Colossians 3:17 says pretty much the same thing: "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Thankfulness is directly related to our joy, happiness, and faithful Christian lives. Here's how. If we really appreciate what God does, and if we are truly thankful for that, will we not follow that up by living faithfully to the Lord? Think about Luke 17. Did you know that God expects you to say "thank you"? In Luke 17:11-18 there were ten lepers. They came to Jesus, and He told them what to do to be cleansed. He healed all ten of them. Yet only one came back to thank the Lord. Jesus said, "Where are the nine?" What a haunting question! One out of ten lepers came back to show respect to Jesus and to offer Him thanks. Jesus asked, "Where are the nine?" What can we learn from this? God expects us to be thankful because thankfulness is directly related to faithfulness. If we are thankful, we want to be faithful. We want to show God our faithfulness by living true to His will.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 we then are told that we are not to quench the Spirit or put out the Spirit's fire. We need to let the Word of God always have a burning place in our hearts like it did in Jeremiah's heart (Jer. 20:9). We need to be like the men on the road to Emmaus whose hearts burned within them as they strove to do the will of God.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 we are told, "Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good." If we learn to apply this principle in our Christian lives to moral situations and Bible teaching, it will solve a multitude of problems. God does not mind us testing or proving things. He said, "Come, let us reason together" (Is. 1:18). God said in Isaiah 34:16, "Search from the book of the Lord, and read..." God does not have any problem with us testing and proving. God said that we should reason, and that we should search and read. Testing does not mean that we doubt God. It means that we are making sure of things. How does this relate in a practical way? When it comes to the preaching of the Gospel, each person has an awesome responsibility to test what he hears in order to make sure that it is true to the Word of God. When someone says, "All you have to be saved is 'such and such,'" you then should ask, "Where is that in the Bible? I want to prove it because my soul is too important to simply believe what you are saying. Where does God say it?" For example, a lot of people will say that in order to be saved, all a person has to do is say the sinner's prayer—"Lord, I realize that You are the Savior. I accept You in my heart. Please forgive me of my sins. I know that I am now saved with You. In Jesus' name, Amen." Is that what the Bible teaches? This is what we are talking about when we are talking about testing things. Neither that prayer, nor any variation of it, is ever found a single time in the Scriptures. From Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, you will not find that prayer anywhere. You will not find one example of it. You will not find one reference to it. You will not find even a small variation of it or anything similar to it. People never were saved by saying a so-called "sinner's prayer." Yet millions of people have been told to say it, and have bought into it hook, line, and sinker—because they did not "test all things." Do you realize that your immortal soul depends on your testing all things? In 1 John 4:1 we are told, "Test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." We must test what we hear.

But we also must test what we do. Before you participate in any action, it must be "of faith." Romans 14:23 says, "Whatever is not of faith is sin." If something is not "of faith," then it is sinful. If we do not know whether we should do it, that means that if we do it, then we are violating what is right. So we have a responsibility to test our actions. Before we get involved in practices such as playing the lottery, dancing, smoking, drinking, and other such things, we need to ask, "What does the Bible say about that?" Dancing is against God's will (Gal. 5). Gambling is not authorized, and can cause a person to become addicted. Drugs and alcohol are condemned (Eph. 5:18; Prov. 20:1). The principle is that we must test what we hear and prove that what we are doing is right, even before we enter into such actions.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:22 Paul says, "Abstain from every appearance of evil." Something does not necessarily have to be evil in and of itself to be wrong. It may be simply that the appearance of it is evil. There are things that definitely are evil. And there are things that are associated with the world. Christians must abstain from both of those. In 1 Timothy 6, Paul told Timothy to abstain from fleshly lusts, run from them, and do not have anything to do with them. Get away from them. Joseph is a perfect example of that. In the Book of Genesis, Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife to have sexual relations. Joseph found himself in a difficult situation. She caught him in the house, where she grabbed him. She wanted to have relations with him. Joseph ran out of the house and left his garment in her hands. Joseph abstained from the very appearance of evil. Are we doing that? Are we

really abstaining from the appearance of evil? This requires that we not associate with things that are “of the world.” Why should a Christian not be involved in dancing? There are multiple reasons. First and foremost, it is not authorized in Scripture. Second, it causes lustful thoughts. Third, it is viewed as an action of the world—one from which we need to abstain. It is associated with things that are connected to sin, ungodliness, lusts of the flesh, etc. We must abstain from sin.

Are you sure that you are living your life the way you ought to be living it? Are you sure that you are right with God? The Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians teach us that Jesus is coming. That is something to which we should look forward. It is something for which we should hope. But in order to do that, we must make sure that we are right with God. The Second Coming is too important an event. We do not know when it will happen. Thus, we must always be ready. How does one get ready? To be ready, a person must obey the Gospel to ensure that he is doing what God has said to do to be saved. Are you sure that you are saved? Earlier we talked about “testing all things, and holding fast to that which is good.” I want to challenge you to test your salvation in order to make sure that you are right with God. What does the Bible say that a person must do to be saved? A person must hear the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” A person also must believe in Jesus. Jesus said in John 8:24, “Unless you believe that I am He, you will surely die in your sins.” In Acts 8, as Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch were traveling down the road, they came to water and the eunuch asked, “What hinders me from being baptized?” Philip then said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:36ff.). Once a person believes in Jesus, he must repent. Peter preached in Acts 3:19, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Having repented, a person then must make the good confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Acts 8:37-39 and Matthew 10:32-33 both teach that with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10). Then, when a person has made the good confession, he must be baptized to be saved. This is where a lot of people do not stop and “prove all things.” The Scriptures teach that baptism is essential to salvation. Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk. 16:16). Jesus said in John 3:5, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” The Scriptures teach that a person must have his sins washed away—an action that occurs at the point of baptism (Acts 22:16). How could this point be made any clearer than it is in 1 Peter 3:21, where we read, “Baptism does now also save you”? I therefore encourage you to test and prove matters related to salvation. Your soul is too important to leave it hanging in the balances of men. Make sure today that you have done what you need to do to be saved. In view of the Second Coming, may each of us live our lives in such a way that we will be ready when the Lord comes to take us home.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS LESSON 2  
(CHAPTERS 3-5)**

1. According to 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, what was one of the reasons that Paul wrote the two Thessalonian epistles?
2. What does Hebrews 4:12 say?
3. According to Acts 20:32, what can the Word of God do for us?
4. According to 1 Peter 2:21, what relationship are we to have to Jesus Christ?
5. What did Jesus say in Luke 18:1?
6. What does James 5:16 say about prayer?
7. What does James 1:2 say about the trials of Christians?
8. According to Psalm 119:67,71, what benefits can Christians derive from trials and tribulations?
9. What does 1 Peter 5:7 teach?
10. According to 1 John 2:15-16, in what are Christians not supposed to engage?
11. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:3, in what Christians not supposed to engage?
12. According to 1 Peter 2:11, what do fleshly lusts do?
13. According to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, what will happen to people who engage in fleshly lusts?
14. What does 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 admonish Christians to do?
15. According to this lesson, what single topic is covered in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 through 1 Thessalonians 5:11?
16. What admonition did Paul give in 1 Thessalonians 5:16?
17. What admonition did Paul give in 1 Thessalonians 5:17?
18. What admonition did Paul give in 1 Thessalonians 5:21?
19. What admonition did Paul give in 1 Thessalonians 5:22?
20. What did Paul mean when he said in Romans 14:23 that "whatever is not of faith is sin."
21. In Isaiah 1:18, what does God invite people to do?