

PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES FOR LAST DAYS LIVING

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
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Let's Begin

A.W. Tozer once said, "What we need very badly these days is a company of Christians who are prepared to trust God as completely now as they know they must do at the last day. For each of us the time is surely coming when we shall have nothing but God. Health and wealth and friends and hiding places will all be swept away and we shall have only God."

How do you plan your days? Your time? Even your vacation? Do you hobble along, day by day, week in-week out making no serious effort to live life according to God's blueprint? Or, do you live out these last days according to Biblical principles revealed in God's Word? The significance of the above questions cannot be overestimated. Paul's obvious concern for the Thessalonians focused on their commitment to live life to its fullest potential according to Jesus Christ.

As we wrap up Paul's first letter to Thessalonica, we will hammer out three practical principles Paul revealed as the last days before Jesus comes is expended. Hence, as we study chapter five, let's follow the simple outline below:

- I. Principle One: Godly Living Until Jesus Comes (vv. 1-11)**
- II. Principle Two: Godly Leading Until Jesus Comes (vv. 12-15)**
- III. Principle Three: Godly Learning Until Jesus Comes (vv. 16-28)**

I. Principle One: Godly Living Until Jesus Comes (vv. 1-11)

Paul never tires of explaining in detail, if necessary, the principles of Christian living. For him, while doctrine is non-negotiable, true Biblical revelation cannot be embraced in a moral vacuum. In other words, the doctrine we believe determines to a large part the life we live. Correct doctrine alone is insufficient to fully live the Christian life. W.A. Criswell once indicated he had rather have a doctrinal "t" uncrossed than to go through his existence on earth void of Christian principles fleshed out in his life. Both belief and behavior are non-negotiable aspects of living a godly life until Jesus Christ returns.

With such a principle in mind, note the words Paul pens as he begins the closing chapter of his first letter to the Thessalonians. He writes, "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (vv. 1-5).

As noted above, Paul starts with *doctrine*, doctrine specifically relating to Christ's second appearing. Evidently, a sizable group of Christian believers was unsettled about the end times. Hence, Paul refers to the "times and seasons" about Christ's coming back. Curiosity was getting the best of them. In fact, it was affecting the way they were going about their daily activities (cp. 4:11). Paul insists that while no

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one can know the exact time (cp. Acts 1:7; Matt. 24:36), it is possible and not inappropriate to have a *general sense* of the time period when Christ will return.

To explain what he means by the *general sense* of timing for Christ's return, Paul summons the use of two colorful images to assist. *First, the "day of the Lord" will be like an unexpected thief.* What thief would give details concerning his planned vandalism? To offer details would only spoil his hope to gather his booty (cp. 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:10). Thieves come to succeed in stealing, killing, and destroying (John 10:10).

Note also in Paul's description the difference between "us," "we," and "they." The Apostle is clearly referring to the distinction between those who are saved and those who are unsaved. The unsaved are "in darkness" and therefore cannot anticipate the coming of the thief (cp. Eph. 4:18; 5:18; 6:12; John 3:19-21). On the other hand, believers are "children of light," and "children of the day." Hence, we can anticipate the thief's arrival (cp. Eph. 5:8-14; Col.1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Cor. 4:6).

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Reflection Connection

What determines whether one is a child of light or a child of darkness? How does one know he or she is a child of the light?

The second image Paul summons to explain

the believer's life until Christ's coming is the birth of a child. Whereas the thief came in the covering of the dark, the child comes "suddenly" without a moment's notice. An expectant mother may surely know the general time of her anticipated child. Sharp pains give her undeniable knowledge the birth will soon take place. Our Lord spoke of His coming being preceded by "birth pangs" (Mark 13:8). People will be rejoicing in unprecedented ways when Christ returns. Unsaved persons will never think the end is near. Their one goal will be the pursuit of pleasure.

Now that Paul has forged the doctrinal portion of godly living, he moves to the second aspect of the principle—*duty*. Duty flows from doctrine and is built upon it.

First in his discussion are *Christian admonitions*. He writes, "Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation" (vv. 6-8). Paul counsels the believers to "not sleep"; that is, they are not to yield to sloth and sin. Instead, they must remain on "watch" and be "sober" since the Lord's coming is soon. Moreover, the "breastplate of faith and love" must protect them from the enemy's assault. The believer is a soldier armed and ready for battle (cp. Eph. 6:10-16).

Second in his discussion is a *Christian's appointment* (vv. 9-10). And, while the unsaved has an appointed hour to meet before the throne of God, Paul specifically speaks here of the believer's moment before the throne. Note that Christians do not "obtain" salvation. Instead salvation is a gift bestowed upon the believer. Christ made salvation possible through His death on the cross.



II. Principle Two: Godly Leading Until Jesus Comes (vv. 12-15)

Not only should every believer be busy living a godly Christian life as we noted above, but also we have a special need for godly leadership in the last days church. Paul writes, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves” (vv. 12-13).

First, Paul discusses those who lead (vv. 12-13). He offers them a two-fold word of encouragement. On the one hand, we must *appreciate* our leaders; that is, we must “know them.” All believers have equal spiritual privileges, but not all have some gifts (cp. 1 Cor. 12:28). Some believers are given as gifts to the church to build it up (Eph. 4:12). Paul speaks of leaders as those who “labour among you.” No greater servant exists than the godly pastor. Yet, the pastor must ever remain humble because of the great responsibility he has received—they “are over you in the Lord.” A pastor is responsible for the spiritual welfare of God’s flock.

On the other hand, we must *esteem* our leaders. Paul says we are to “esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” Leaders must receive our strongest affection. People who love their pastor will receive a hundredfold in return! If,

however, all the pastor receives is criticism, complaint, or grumbling, the perfect formula for failure is forged. To be at “peace among yourselves” leaders must receive both appreciation and esteem.

Second, Paul discusses those who are led (vv. 14-15). He writes, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*. See that none render evil for evil unto any *man*; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all *men*” (vv. 14-15). Someone rightly said the only way to tell if a person is a leader is to check and see if anyone is following. Real leaders have real followers. And, the Apostle gives certain responsibilities every follower possesses.

First, the follower is *patient*. One pastor quipped, “Pastoring a church would be an easy job if it wasn’t for the people!” Unfortunately for him, the church IS the people. Indeed the church has yet to exist which does not have special groups which need special care. The church Jesus built is made up of people, and people—including *saved people*—are not perfect. Paul points out three particular groups concerning which patience must be demonstrated. Paul notes the “unruly”; that is, those who are out of step with the flow of things. Hardly the happy type, the unruly crowd looks for policies to criticize or procedures to avoid.

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Reflection Connection

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest degree), where do you fit so far as exemplifying patience with others is concerned? Are you comfortable sharing your score with the entire study group?

Next, Paul mentions the “feble-minded.” The Apostle is not thinking about the mentally challenged. Instead, he refers to those who are easily discouraged. Every church has members who will forsake a task or abandon a project when even the slightest obstacle surfaces. These people must continually be comforted. Finally, Paul refers to the “weak.” Again, Paul is not imagining those who have physical problems. Rather he is concerned with the morally and spiritually weak. For some men, for example, pornography is a terrible temptation concerning which they must ever be on guard lest they succumb to temptation. The proper response must include patience without sacrificing moral principle or condoning immoral behavior.

Second, the follower is *passive*. By this, Paul means evil must not be repaid with evil. The spirit of revenge has no place in the believer’s life. If one fellow member offends another member, speaking about the issue is entirely appropriate, but planning to “get back” at the offending party is not an option for the Christian who desires to live a godly life.

Finally, the follower is *persistent*. Believers pursue what is good, for others as well as themselves. And, this is a lifestyle which needs nurturing each and every day.

III. Principle Three: Godly Learning Until Jesus Comes (vv. 16-28)

Similar to Paul’s beginning of the chapter is Paul’s ending of it. Over and over, the Apostle recycles the idea that living life to its fullest potential in Jesus Christ must remain the central tenet of Christian discipleship. Hence, he closes his first correspondence to the Thessalonian congregation with both personal and congregational counsel. Every believer individually and the church corporately must develop learning strategies until Jesus returns.

First, Paul offers personal counsel to each individual Christian. He writes, “Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (vv. 16-18). The Apostle offers three injunctions to individual believers, injunctions which are always in force. That is, the injunctions never cease. First, believers are to be *joyful*—“rejoice evermore.” Glum, grouchy Christians are a poor testimony to Biblical faith. Even when things are unpleasant, believers must be joyful. Indeed trouble is not incompatible with Christian joy.

Next, Paul enjoins the believer to be *prayerful*—“pray without ceasing.” Believers often find prayer to be a means of receiving joy. Know also by “without ceasing” Paul is not thinking of being on one’s knees all the time. Instead he refers to the life filled with the spirit of prayer. In other words, one is to live so close to Jesus, he or she can talk and/or listen to Him under the most trying circumstances.

Finally, the believer is to be *thankful*—“in everything give thanks.” Many Christians scramble to “find” the will of God for their lives. One is tempted to ask, “Where did you lose it?” Paul plainly states in the clearest terms the will of God for every believer’s life here—“in everything give thanks.” By this, Paul does not mean, for example, one must not grieve the death of a loved one. How absurd to imagine Paul meant to stand over the casket of a child lost in



Reflection Connection

Paul says “quench not the spirit.” Reflect on ways you personally “quench the spirit.” Be honest. What can you do to assist in allowing the Holy Spirit to flow freely in your life? Explain.

Golden Greek Nugget

Concerning believers, Paul denies that God has “appointed us to wrath” (v. 9). The Greek term translated “appointed” is *tithemi*, which literally means “to put” or “to set.” Jesus used the term in reference to His disciples (John 15:16). Also, the term has metaphorical allusions to “grafting” as in “grafting” one limb onto to another. Note Paul says God will not “set” or “place” us in a position to bear His “wrath.” The Greek term translated “wrath” is *orgē*, which carries the idea of hot displeasure, a deep-seated anger. Paul’s meaning is clear: Christians will never face God’s wrath coming upon the world of humanity, especially during the Great Tribulation.

an automobile accident and be thankful your child is dead. Instead we are to develop a deep understanding that God is sovereign over all (Rom. 8:28). We must develop the spirit of gratitude for every aspect of life.

Second, Paul offers corporate counsel to every congregation (vv. 19-28). Christians not only have individual spiritual lives, they also are interconnected to the body of Christ, the church. In other words, Christians have *body life* which must be developed. Concerning the body life, Paul offers four succinct lines of counsel.

First, the congregation must be *sensitive*—“quench not the spirit.” The Greek term translated “quench” carries the idea of putting out a fire. And, since the Holy Spirit is likened to a flame (Acts 2:3; Matt. 3:11; Isa. 4:4), Paul’s meaning concerns the stifling of the Holy Spirit’s operation in the life of the congregation. Mechanical order is out of the question. The Spirit moves as He wishes.

Second, the congregation must be *receptive*—“despise not prophesying.” Paul’s concern centers on treating those who prophesy with contempt. Some in the church apparently held preaching in low esteem. In fact, those types of people are still around today. Many are only interested in the latest music or some new trend. Others may like “preaching” but only if it resembles more a pep talk than it does Biblical exposition. Scripture forbids churches to despise the proclamation of God’s Word.

Third, congregations must be *selective*—“prove...hold.” Believers must not swallow everything that comes along. False doctrine and unwholesome teaching abound in our culture. Hence, Christians should be selective and discerning, gauging what is presented as truth by the Word of God (cp. 1 John 4:1). Consequently, when we have found the real thing, we are to “hold fast” to the truth.

Fourth, congregations must be *prohibitive*—“abstain from all appearance of evil.” Every visible form of evil is to be shunned and avoided. Churches cannot get entangled with questionable practice. “When in doubt, don’t” is a practical rule worth pursuing.

In addition, “abstaining from all appearance of evil” implies we should embrace every form of good. It is only then that, as Paul says, “the very God of peace sanctify you wholly” (v. 23a). What happens when we are sanctified wholly? According to the Apostle, every aspect of our lives will be affected. He writes, “and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (vv. 23b-24).

Paul closes his first letter to the Thessalonians with an appeal for their prayers and an encouragement to them to communicate his letter to other churches, “Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen” (vv. 25-28).

Wrap Up

Paul’s Divine counsel to both individual Christians as well as the whole congregation must be taken seriously if the church is to remain healthy in these last days. Every form of heresy, false doctrine, and immoral behavior has invaded sectors of God’s church. Christians must be on guard. With Paul’s counsel being readily available, believers can live godly lives as they prepare for the coming of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

