

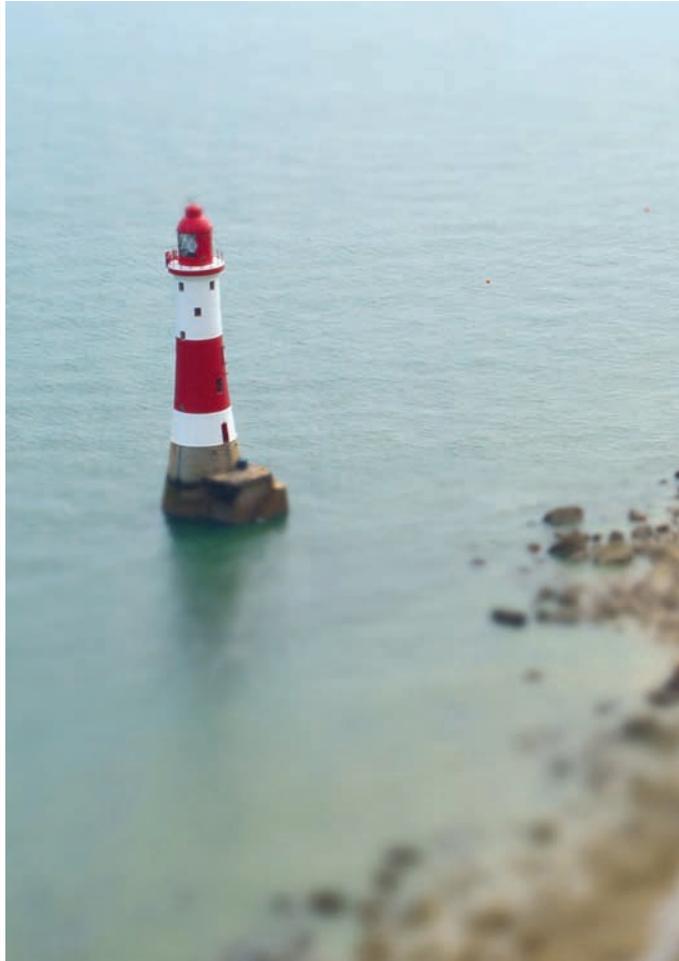
JULY 2015

# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

What is our hope,  
our joy, or the  
crown in which  
we will glory in  
the presence of  
our Lord Jesus  
when he comes?

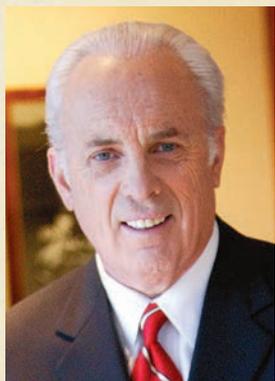
1 Thessalonians 2:19



Living in Hope:  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

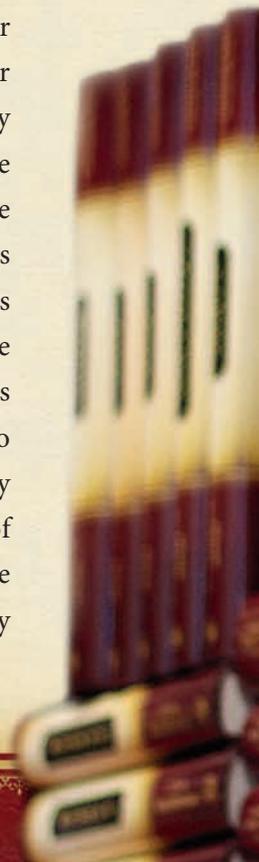
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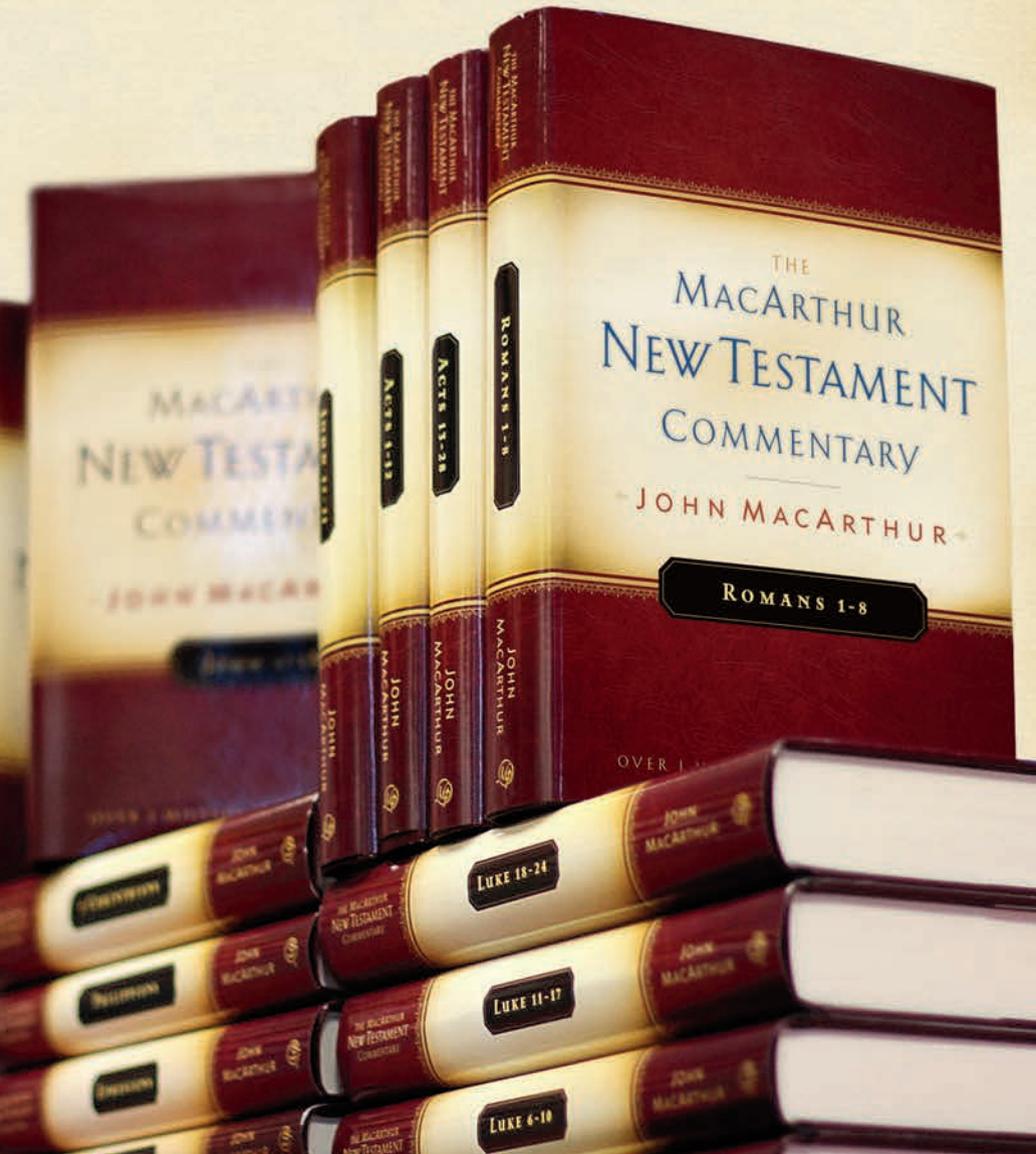
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*From the Word to Life*



# TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

Thessalonians: Living in Light of Tomorrow



Views of Scripture have changed dramatically in our nation in recent decades. It used to be the case that many people, even those who attended church

only sporadically or who didn't consider themselves particularly religious, still had great respect for the Bible.

Today, the opposite is true. Only one third of Americans believe the Bible is the literal Word of God. One in five Americans (20.6 percent) say the Bible is a book of fables, a number up 41 percent since 1984. An American Bible Society survey revealed that 26 percent of adult Americans never read the Bible and 48 percent read it less than once or twice a year.

Our culture doesn't share Christian values and has become increasingly antagonistic toward what we believe.

Without doubt, this month's study of Paul's letters to the church at Thessalonica is both timely and relevant. Paul was writing to encourage the Thessalonians to remain strong in their faith. Thessalonica was a large city with an estimated 200,000 citizens. The city contained the principal seaport of Macedonia, making it prosperous and influential in the Roman world. Thessalonica was also known as a center for pagan Greek religions; some have nicknamed it "Sin City."

Paul and Timothy originally visited the church on their second missionary journey, as recorded in Acts 17. Thessalonica was the second place the gospel was preached in Europe. Many of the converts in Thessalonica were not Jewish—this was predominantly a church of Gentile converts.

When Paul was forced to leave, he sent Timothy back with letters to the Thessalonian believers. Despite persecution, the Thessalonian church was prospering. The letters contain words of encouragement, but also warnings about false teachers and advice for living in the face of persecution. Paul speaks specifically about the Day of the Lord and the return of Christ.

The Apostle encourages believers to live today in such a way that they are mindful of the future. The emphasis is not just on the events to come, however—our attention is fixed on Whom we serve. Our God is faithful: "Faithful is He who calls you ..." (1 Thess. 5:24). Because we serve a faithful God, we can be prepared for persecution. We can remain strong. We can discern false teaching. We can avoid immorality and live holy lives today in light of our eternal future with Him.

We are called into God's eternal kingdom. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12, Paul writes, "Walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." With this assurance, we can remain committed to holiness no matter how difficult the circumstances.

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



## The Doctrine of Last Things

Eschatology is the branch of theology that is concerned with the end of time, the study of last things, and particularly (though not exclusively) matters related to the return of Jesus Christ. Eschatology is a major focus in Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians. The Bible's teachings about the return of Christ are meant to be a comfort to us. Paul directed the Thessalonian church to "encourage each other with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18).

Unfortunately, the church's interest in this area of study has sometimes been too focused on speculation. Some have tried to use what the Bible says about eschatology to pinpoint the exact time when Christ will return. Believers are also divided in their views on the subject, and there is much that we don't know about the end of all things. Jesus warned His disciples that the times and dates have been set by the Father's own authority. The details have not been given to us.

But Scripture gives us enough information regarding the end to help those who are grieving (1 Thess. 4:13). The hope of Christ's coming is a powerful incentive for godly living (Luke 21:34; 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3). We should not be surprised that people disagree about the events surrounding Christ's return. Even in the days of the Apostles, people had different opinions

about events at the end of time. Peter warned that as the day approaches, more and more people will grow skeptical about Christ's return and misinterpret the reason for the apparent delay (2 Peter 3:3-4). He tells us the reason Christ has not already returned: so that others may come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

General eschatology focuses on the events associated with Christ's Second Coming and the establishment of His kingdom. Personal eschatology focuses on what happens to someone after death and at the judgment. The biblical teachings regarding the resurrection of the body and final judgment both fall under the category of personal eschatology. Paul links the resurrection of believers to the reality that they will be gathered to Christ (1 Thess. 4:15-17; cf. 1 Cor. 15:23). Bodily resurrection is the capstone of the believer's redemption (Rom. 8:23). In this final transformation our perishable body will be replaced with one which is immortal (1 Cor. 15:54).

The overall theme of biblical eschatology is hope. General eschatology concerns itself with the "blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Personal eschatology is concerned with "the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6).

### For Further Study

To learn more about eschatology, read *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* by Paul Benware (Moody Publishers).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Paul Currie

## Seeking God Together

Greetings *Today in the Word* readers! I am honored to serve you as executive editor. And I want you to know it is our desire at *Today in the Word* to encourage you to spend time with Jesus each day in God's Word. Spending time reflecting and praying how we can submit ourselves to His will each day. A time of praising Him and asking for His help with our daily lives. And then the Lord patiently and gently reminding us that "All you need is found in Me." I'm reminded of the chorus of "Life Love & Other Mysteries" by Point of Grace, which states:

You are Lord of life, love and  
other mysteries  
You know my future  
You know my history  
I find in You all I ever need to know  
About life and love and other  
mysteries.

How true that is! God knows everything about us. As it says in Jeremiah 29:11, "For

I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" He has plans for us! Isn't that exciting? We can talk to Him about anything. We can ask Him questions about anything. He has already provided answers for us in His Word. Let's continue to seek answers to life's mysteries together in God's Word!

I also want to take this opportunity to share my appreciation for YOU, our readers, for your faithful prayers and financial support. We are so grateful to receive letters from you and discover how *Today in the Word* is being used in your relationship with God. From time to time we include your feedback in an issue because we know that sharing our experiences encourages and reminds other readers that they are not alone as we are seeking God *together* in His Word!

Summer is the season when many of us are able to get away and enjoy some time on vacation. Don't forget to take your *Today in the Word* with you when you go! If you happen to forget and have Internet access, you can always read it online or have each day's devotional sent to your email inbox for free at [www.todayintheword.com](http://www.todayintheword.com).

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# TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

## Living in Hope: 1 and 2 Thessalonians

In 1976, well-known theologian, pastor, and philosopher Francis Schaeffer published a book with a title, *How Should We Then Live?* that resonated with many Christians of the day. The book pondered the development of Western culture from ancient Rome to the present and searched to answer existential questions of the 20th century. But Christians already had the answer to the question posed in the title. The answer came from another famous theologian, pastor, and philosopher in the 50s—two thousand years earlier, in the 50s of the 1st century.

Two small books of the New Testament, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, written by the apostle Paul to the believers in the Macedonian port city of Thessalonica, tell Christians how to live, no matter the century or the country. As we study 1 and 2 Thessalonians this month in *Today in the Word*, we'll see that the issues they struggled with are similar to ours, and the gospel Paul preached to them makes the foundation of our lives as well.

We pray that as we look into the topics of prayer and hope, hope and love, hope and joy, hope and truth, hope and suffering, and others this month, we'll better understand what it means to live "by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:3). Your prayers and financial contributions to *Today in the Word* help us share this hope with many readers. Thank you for your faithful support of this ministry. May we all grow in "endurance inspired by hope"!

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## A Tale of Two Cities

Thessalonica was the capital of the province of Macedonia at the time. Its location made it a strategic point of access for the spread of the gospel (1 Thess. 1:8). But given a choice between the cities of Thessalonica and Berea, Berea surely would have seemed like a better candidate to receive correspondence from the apostle Paul. Berea was more receptive to Paul's message than Thessalonica. Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica after being imprisoned in Philippi, where they were also stripped and severely flogged (Acts 16:22–23).

But interestingly, we have no record of Paul sending a letter to Berea.

Paul and Silas encountered opposition from Jewish religious leaders in Thessalonica, who grew jealous when they saw that Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, and even idol-worshiping pagans were embracing the gospel (Acts 17:2–5; cf. 1 Thess. 1:9). This tension led to a riot, during which Paul's opponents accused the followers of Jesus of being law-breakers and revolu-

tionaries. The situation was so tense that the believers in Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas to Berea by night.

In Berea, Paul employed the same evangelistic strategy he had used in Thessalonica, beginning in the synagogue. Paul's usual custom was to "reason" from

the Scriptures (Acts 17:2, 17). This approach probably involved some form of discussion or dialogue. The Bereans were more receptive to the gospel message than those in Thessalonica. They listened attentively to his message—but they were not

gullible. The Bereans compared the truths Paul taught with the things that were written in the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

Unfortunately, when those who had opposed Paul in Thessalonica heard about what was happening in Berea, they came there, too, intent on stirring up the crowd. As a protective measure, the believers sent Paul away to the coast. Silas and Timothy remained behind to follow up with this fledgling church.

For the word  
of God is alive  
and active.

Hebrews 4:12

### Apply the Word

Paul's experience in both cities was a testimony to the power of the gospel. As we begin this study of Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians, expect God to reveal that power in your life. Ask Him to give you the same "noble" spirit that motivated the Bereans so that you will receive Paul's message with eagerness and will examine the Scripture daily to understand its truth.

### Pray with Us

Please join us in praying for Moody's trustees, as they plan new ventures and projects of Moody global outreach. We ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance, so that in all decisions God's name will be glorified.

## Stronger Than Words

Poet Emily Dickinson observed, “A word is dead when it’s been said, some say. I say it just begins to live that day.” This is especially true when it comes to God’s words. All words have power, but God’s words convey the power of God. The word of God is “alive and active” (Heb. 4:12). One proof of this is the effect that the gospel had on those who heard it in Thessalonica. Despite opposition, many in Thessalonica responded to Paul’s message with faith. This was a work of the Holy Spirit (vv. 4–5).

The gospel’s power is also demonstrated in its capacity to transform those who believe its message.

For the Thessalonian Christians, faith was more than a verbal affirmation of what they believed about Jesus; their faith was reflected in their actions. This change was brought about by the Holy Spirit, but they also needed to see someone modeling this kind of life of faith. The Thessalonians learned how to live the Christian life by observing and imitating

Paul. They in turn became a model to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (vv. 6–7). Paul gave them an example of holding to the word despite suffering. This may be a reference to the opposition he experienced while in Thessalonica and later in Berea.

The power of God  
... brings salvation  
to everyone who  
believes: first to the  
Jew, then to  
the Gentile.

Romans 1:16

By following Paul’s example, the Thessalonians became imitators of Christ and channels of God’s love. The resulting transformation of their lives caused others to take note and comment. In this way their lives became a sounding board that amplified the truth of the gospel, causing it to “ring out” from Thes-

salonica to the surrounding regions (vv. 8–10). This was not a silent witness. Those who heard about the Thessalonians’ change in lifestyle also learned about the gospel message that prompted it. The ultimate focus of their message was Jesus, God’s resurrected and coming Son who rescues us from the judgment to come.

### Apply the Word

Paul’s description of the Thessalonians’ response to the gospel helps to clarify the relationship between faith and action in the Christian life. Christian living is a response to faith, not a basis for faith. We act because we have been acted upon by God’s Spirit. We live the Christian life because we are Christians, not in order to become Christians. Believe—and be transformed.

### Pray with Us

Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of Moody Theological Seminary, would appreciate your prayers today for the seminary’s faculty and staff and their mission of training our students for a powerful ministry in the world.

## How to Preach the Gospel

Most books about preaching focus on technique; the same is true of many evangelistic methods, which focus on outlines and methods. Today's passage highlights another important element in the communication of the gospel by emphasizing the importance of the preacher's character.

Those who tried to undermine the ministry of Paul and his companions in Philippi and in Thessalonica did so by attacking their character, not their theology. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were falsely accused of advocating lawless behavior (Acts 16:20–21). In Thessalonica, they accused Paul and his team of defying the government (Acts 17:6–7). Criticism of Paul continued even after he was forced to flee the city by night (Acts 17:10). Paul's enemies compared him to the many philosophers for hire who traveled from city to city and used their speaking ability to take advantage of gullible listeners.

Even though Paul did not stay long in Thessalonica, he left a lasting impres-

sion. To counter the false accusations of his enemies, Paul appealed to the first-hand experience of his audience, noting his motives as much as his methods. He was not motivated by greed, nor did he attempt to manipulate his audience by telling them what they wanted to hear. God's approval was more important to Paul than public acclaim. His ministry in Thessalonica was marked by loving concern and self-sacrifice. The Apostle was eager to share his life with them as a demonstration of the message of the gospel.

The validity of the gospel message is independent of the messenger. The gospel is still true even when the character of those who share it is false. Yet Paul's opponents knew that if they could persuade his audience to question the Apostle's character and his motives, they would doubt the message as well. If we want to be effective communicators of the good news, we need to do more than work on our technique. We need to pay attention to our motives and our character.

It is true that some  
preach Christ out  
of envy and rivalry,  
but others out  
of goodwill.

Philippians 1:15

### Apply the Word

The three negatives in verses 5 and 6 provide a helpful starting point for distinguishing false teachers from true messengers of the gospel. Are they manipulating us by telling us what we want to hear? Do they seem to be more interested in personal gain than in godliness? Do they serve the church, or does the church serve them?

### Pray with Us

Smooth operation of Moody Theological Seminary in Michigan wouldn't be possible without a strong administrative support from Christopher Brooks, campus dean, and Paul Wilson, associate dean of student services. Please keep them in your prayers.

## Working for Jesus

Bible colleges like Moody Bible Institute often distinguish themselves from Christian colleges that focus on the liberal arts by emphasizing that their mission is to train students for “vocational” ministry or “full-time Christian service.” This does not mean that paid professionals are the only people doing ministry in the church or that most of the church serves Christ on a part-time basis. Instead, it is a helpful reminder that ministry is work.

For Paul serving the Lord involved “toil and hardship” (v. 9). This was true in two ways: in addition to the work of ministry, Paul also worked to support himself “in order not to be a burden to anyone.” Paul was a tentmaker, an occupation he shared with his colleagues Aquila and Priscilla (see Acts 18:2). He came from a region that was famous for producing high quality materials for making tents and probably learned his craft from his father. Tentmaking was a form of manual labor that required the Apostle to make a living by working hard with his

hands (1 Cor. 4:12). Some criticized Paul for this practice (1 Cor. 9:3-7; 2 Cor. 11:7). But in Paul’s eyes, the work of ministry and the labor of tentmaking were two sides of the same effort devoted to Christ.

Paul’s motivation for working night and day was love. Indeed, love shaped all his behavior toward the Thessalonians. Paul cared for the Thessalonians the way a father cares for his children. Normally the parents provide for the needs of their children, not the other way around (cf. 2 Cor. 12:14).

Join with me in  
suffering, like a  
good soldier of  
Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 2:3

Although Paul had a right to expect support from those to whom he ministered, he preferred to provide for those needs by plying a trade. This served two purposes. It guaranteed that Paul would not be a financial burden to the Thessalonians. It also provided an example of the spiritual value of ordinary work in a cultural context where many thought that work was beneath them (2 Thess. 3:9).

### Apply the Word

We sometimes separate our lives into sacred and secular categories. Some imply that only the work that’s done inside the church really matters; what happens outside of “ministry” is irrelevant or meaningless. How would it change the way you approach your job to see it as an exercise in devotion to God? How does it enable you to provide for others and serve Him more effectively?

### Pray with Us

As we celebrate Independence Day today, let’s pray together for our country, its present and future. Let us ask the Lord in prayer, according to 2 Chronicles 7:14, to “hear from heaven. . . and heal [our] land.”

## Hard of Hearing

Elephants hear far better than humans, but not only because of their ears. They have special receptors in their trunk and in their feet that allow them to pick up low-frequency vibrations. This gives them an uncanny ability to locate rain, for instance. Hearing is also an important aspect of Christian life. In his book *The Divine Voice*, author Stephen Webb observes that Christianity has an “oral” quality. “By speaking to us, God grants us the ability to listen, and when we are stirred by God’s voice we rise above the animal state and begin to speak ourselves.”

If anyone has  
ears to hear, let  
them hear.

Mark 4:23

Paul was grateful to God for granting the Thessalonians discernment to recognize that his teaching was “not the word of men” (v. 13). This ability to “hear” Paul’s message had two important dimensions. First, it involved an acknowledgement of its authority. The Thessalonian believers recognized that God was the ultimate source of the things that Paul preached to them. Second, they recognized its power. This was the word which is “at work” in

all who believe. Words have divine power when God is their author.

Paul used the language of tradition when he described his message as something that the Thessalonians had “received.” The Greek word used here meant something that was “handed down.” Paul’s message did not originate with him. He learned it from Christ. Likewise, the Thessalonian believers were not alone in either their hearing or in their suffering for that message. By receiving Paul’s gospel as the word of God they became “imitators of God’s churches in

Judea” (v. 14).

The opposition described in verses 15 and 16 is a reminder that God’s Word does not work like a magic spell. Not everyone who hears takes it to heart. Hearing must be combined with faith before it can have its full effect. These verses also include a sober reminder that God will hold us accountable for what we hear. Those who reject God’s message will be judged.

### Apply the Word

Before the printing press, most people encountered God’s Word through hearing. Those who first received this letter probably heard it read when the church gathered for worship. Listening to Scripture can provide insights that we might miss when we are reading for ourselves. If you have access to an audio Bible, take some time to listen to Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians.

### Pray with Us

During your time with the Lord today, please uphold in prayer the service at Moody of our chief financial officer, Ken Heullitt, and his teams. May they continue to be good stewards of the resources the Lord has given us.

## Interrupted Plans and Unfulfilled Desires

Author J. M. Barrie observed, “The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story, and writes another; and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it.”

Planning is good, but even good plans often unfold in unexpected ways. This was true for the apostle Paul, who had a strong desire to see the Thessalonians again. The attachment Paul felt for this church, as well as his distress over being “separated” from them, is evident in the language he uses in verse 17 through 20. He does not provide specific details about the circumstances that kept him from returning to Thessalonica, but he does make it clear that Satan hindered his plans.

Good plans sometimes go unfulfilled because Satan places obstacles in our way. Prayer that seeks God’s will and strength should be a part of our planning, preparation, and implementation. Satan may be able to hinder our plans, but he

cannot stop God from accomplishing His purposes.

The emphasis on Paul’s strong desire to see the Thessalonians, combined with his explanation for not following through on this plan, could suggest that the Apostle’s enemies used this absence against him.

There is no wisdom,  
no insight, no plan  
that can succeed  
against the LORD.

Proverbs 21:30

They may have pointed to Paul’s failure to return as proof of his insincerity. Perhaps they suggested that Paul had stirred up trouble in Thessalonica only to leave these new Christians to face the consequences alone. Satan’s interference did not shake Paul’s confidence in the ultimate outcome of his ministry. He was fully assured that God’s gracious work in the Thessalonians would provide him with an occasion to rejoice at Christ’s return.

In the midst of interrupted plans and unfulfilled desires, the apostle Paul was able to maintain a kind of double vision. He discerned the spiritual forces at work in the present while keeping his eye on the final outcome when Jesus returns in glory.

### Apply the Word

How are your plans coming along? You may not be able to see the spiritual forces that affect them as clearly as Paul did, but you can be sure that God is greater than the obstacles before you. Ask God to make his will clear and thwart Satan’s efforts to derail you. As we seek to fulfill our plans, God often changes the path—but the ultimate destination is sure.

### Pray with Us

Thank you for keeping in prayer the Investment Accounting team on Moody’s Chicago campus. Your prayers can make a difference in the life of Daphne Hussey, Marilou Logan, Andrea Palmer-Reed, and Rohan McLachlan.

## Partners in the Gospel

A humorous poster sold by Despair, Inc. mimics the motivational art displayed in the workplace. It shows a runner dropping the baton in a relay race and describes the reality of teamwork this way: “Ensuring that your hard work can always be ruined by someone else’s incompetence.” We chuckle (and maybe nod in recognition!) at this description, but the fact is that teams remain an important feature of the church’s ministry.

Paul often relied on the help of others. Timothy was of particular value to his ministry. He described Timothy to the Philippian church in these words: “I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare” (Phil. 2:20). Although Timothy was Paul’s protégé, today’s passage describes him as a peer. Paul calls him “our brother” and a “co-worker in God’s service” (this phrase could also be translated “God’s fellow worker”). Perhaps this was meant to further reassure the Thessalonians of Paul’s continuing interest in them. Timothy was not the second-string team. He was Paul’s most trusted associate.

For we are God’s  
co-workers; you  
are God’s field,  
God’s building.

1 Corinthians 3:9

Timothy’s mission in Thessalonica was threefold. First, he was sent to continue the work Paul had begun by building them up in the faith. Second, Timothy was sent to reassure the Thessalonian believers, “so that no one would be unsettled by these trials” (v. 3). Were these Paul’s trials? Or was he afraid that in his absence the Thessalonians would question the validity of the gospel because the suffering it had brought upon them? Paul’s language is inclusive and probably has both in view. Timothy was sent to reassure these young believers that their suffering did not fall outside the scope of God’s plan for them.

The third element of Timothy’s mission was to reassure Paul. Timothy’s first-hand account of their continued faith and affection was a source of encouragement to Paul in the midst of distress and persecution (v. 8). Timothy’s ministry to the Thessalonians was an extension of Paul’s, but it was also a ministry to Paul.

## Apply the Word

Is there someone whose ministry has helped you grow in your faith? Perhaps it is a favorite teacher or Sunday school leader. It may be your pastor. When was the last time you let them know how God has used them in your life? Write a letter, note, or email of encouragement to someone today to let them know that their ministry has not been in vain.

## Pray with Us

Please include in your prayers today Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education. Ask the Lord to guide Dr. Venugopal’s ministry at Moody and to encourage him in his day-to-day leadership responsibilities.

## Prayer and Hope

Most of us feel ambivalent about our prayer life. We believe in the importance of prayer, but we do not think that we pray well. Like the disciples who asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, we know there is room for improvement. Prayer is mysterious—but it is not rocket science. In today’s passage the apostle Paul describes the two foundations of the believer’s prayer life: thanksgiving and request.

One dimension of prayer, described in verse 8, is thanksgiving. Prayer provides us with an opportunity to express our gratitude to God. This is Paul’s third expression of thanksgiving in 1 Thessalonians (see 1:2; 2:13). Paul’s inability to fully express his gratitude underscores the inexhaustible nature of God’s goodness. His gifts always outstrip our gratitude.

This prayer of thanksgiving also reveals something about the source of spiritual growth. By giving thanks, Paul acknowledges that their continuance in faith is the result of something God has done.

The Thessalonians don’t deserve the credit and neither does Paul. He and Timothy were instrumental in helping the Thessalonian believers to mature, but it was God’s empowering grace that enabled these new believers to “stand firm in the Lord” (v. 9).

**This, then, is how you should pray.**

*Matthew 6:9*

The other dimension of prayer expressed in these verses is request. Paul prayed that he would see the Thessalonians again and be able to continue the work God had begun through him. The language Paul uses in verse 10 reflects both strong desire

and persistence. Paul repeatedly expresses his desire that Christ would “clear the way” for a return visit (v. 11). The language Paul uses in this request also indicates Christ’s equality with the Father. The two persons of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are the subject of the singular verb translated “clear the way” in verse 12. The Apostle saw them as jointly involved in granting the answers to his prayer.

### Apply the Word

Thanksgiving and request are a good place to begin for anyone who is well aware that their prayer life has plenty of room for improvement. Begin by expressing your appreciation to God. Be specific. Now tell Him what you need and desire. If it helps, put it in writing. If you are still at a loss about what to say, read through the Psalms for more ideas.

### Pray with Us

The next three days, let’s dedicate some time to prayer for our undergraduate faculty in the Music department. Today, uphold in prayer David Gauger, Xiangtang Hong, Jae Hyeok Jang, Jori Jennings, and Brian Lee.

## Hope and Holiness

Has marriage become unnecessary? In his book *The Next America*, Paul Taylor reports some disturbing trends. “In a 2010 Pew Research survey, nearly 4 in 10 (39% of Americans)—and 44% of Millennials—agreed that marriage is becoming obsolete.” Taylor notes that this doesn’t mean young people are no longer interested in marriage. “That survey also found that 70% of Millennials say that they would like to get married one day.” The real shift is not in the institution of marriage as much as it is of morals. What was once considered immoral is now widely accepted, especially in the realm of sexual behavior.

You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

God’s standard of morality demands that we control what we do with our bodies. We are not to live like animals, driven only by instinct and appetite. Paul describes an ethical landscape in which the moral practice of believers is distinct from that of the surrounding culture.

This reminder is especially timely for Christians today who are being pressured to redefine sexual standards so that practices that the Bible describes as sinful are considered morally acceptable. God expects those who belong to Christ to behave differently. Serious social and spiritual consequences are

in store for those who disregard God’s ethical standard. On a social level, human relationships are damaged when people are wronged and taken advantage of through sexual sin. Spiritually, Paul warns: “The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins” (v. 6). These standards are not merely Paul’s. Those who reject them are really rejecting God (v. 8).

Today’s Scripture emphasizes the importance of sexual morality. According to verse 3, one of the most important aspects of holy living is to “avoid sexual immorality.” The word used in the New Testament text refers to a wide range of sexual sin. Abstaining from sexual immorality is a matter of God’s will. It is God who defines what constitutes immorality, not the culture.

### Apply the Word

In his book *Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship Beyond an Age of Individualism*, Dale Kuehne reminds us that the limits God sets regarding sexual behavior are really good news for everyone, not bad news that ruins our lives. You can hear him explain this to interviewer Ken Myers on Volume 99 of *Mars Hill Audio Journal*, available as a CD or mp3 through their website.

### Pray with Us

Today we continue to pray for the Music department faculty on the Chicago campus. Ask the Lord to give Betty-Ann Lynerd, Elizabeth Naegele, Terry Strandt, Gary Rownd, and H. E. Singley renewed vision, resources, and encouragement in their work.

## Hope and Love

Is love innate or is it something we learn? The answer may depend upon how we define love. If we think of love only as a strong attraction to someone, it probably depends upon natural factors. When it comes to ordinary human love, like the love that exists between a child and a parent, we seem to have a natural capacity to form strong bonds. Marital love often begins with physical attraction but grows as we learn more about the other person and is sustained through effort. The love that Paul speaks of in today's passage is something different. It is both something that must be learned and a gift from God.

Paul did not need to write at great length to the Thessalonians about love between believers, but this was not because it was natural for them. This was a love they had learned from God (v. 9). Paul uses language that is drawn from the sphere of

family relationships. New Testament scholar Gordon Fee notes that the Greek term that is translated "love for one another" was originally used in the Greco-Roman world to refer to the relationship between siblings: "But in this its first appearance in the New Testament it has already assumed the familial relationship that God's newly formed people had with each other because of their common relationship to God through Christ."

For this is the  
message you heard  
from the beginning:  
We should love  
one another.

1 John 3:11

Those who are joined to Christ by faith are joined to one another in an extended family that spans both heaven and earth. This vast community is made up of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. As a result, it requires a quality of love that only God can produce within us. Elsewhere in the New Testament the ability to love one another in this way is described as one of the evidences of God's transforming grace (see 1 John 3:10).

### Apply the Word

The love described in these verses is a way of relating to one another. Where should we look in order to learn the art of brotherly love? First ask, "How has God loved us?" The Father loved us enough to send His Son as an atoning sacrifice (1 John 4:10). The Scriptures also teach us to look in the mirror. We are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19).

### Pray with Us

As we conclude our prayer time for the Music faculty, Un-Young Whang and Cynthia Uitermarkt, please also include in your prayer list the administrative staff, Lauren Quiles and Christopher Wheeler, who help coordinate music events and tours.

## A Quiet Life

In his book *Leap Over a Wall*, author Eugene Peterson describes work as “the primary context for our spirituality.” Ordinary work is not opposed to spirituality. Peterson observes, “The spiritual life begins—seriously begins—when we get a job and go to work.”

If we understand our entire lives to be an act of true worship, then the place of work is actually a place of worship. Our work matters to God because the workplace is the context in which we live much of our lives. Most of us spend more time at work than we do at church. We may spend as much or more of our waking hours at work than we do at home.

As Paul continues the thought begun in yesterday’s passage, he urges the Thessalonians to excel in their love for one another by aspiring to “a quiet life.” The

two subsequent commands in verse 11 shed further light on the kind of “quiet” life the Apostle has in view. Paul tells his readers to “mind your own business and work with your hands.” Those who lead a quiet life live responsibly. They tend to their own affairs and refrain from meddling. Those who are able to work are in a position to provide for their own needs and to help others who are unable to work.

Devote themselves  
to doing what is  
good, in order to  
provide for urgent  
needs and not live  
unproductive lives.

Titus 3:14

The quiet life of the believer does not go unnoticed, and this is an important aspect of the church’s testimony to those who are “outsiders” (v. 12). Our work is also our witness. It has spiritual value because it is one of

the ways we show the world how Jesus Christ has transformed our lives. Work also has practical value. It is the primary means that God uses to meet our needs. Our provision of work is also the means He uses to provide for the needs of others.

### Apply the Word

Ordinary work as Paul describes it in these verses is a mode of ministry, the context in which you can bear witness to your faith by simply living out the Christian life. As God provides for your needs through your work, He enables you to be a channel of His grace. Make it your ambition today to work for the glory of God.

### Pray with Us

Your prayers are important for Moody’s president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, in his task of leading Moody Global Ministries through the challenges of today’s world. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s leading in all decisions.

## Hope in Death

In the journal later published under the title *A Grief Observed*, Christian apologist C. S. Lewis offers a blunt account of his struggle with faith that ensued after the death of his wife Joy Davidman. “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear,” Lewis observed. “I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid.”

The hope of the gospel does not make us immune to grief when someone we love dies. Thankfully, however, the gospel does give us the dimension of faith so that we do not “grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope” (v. 13). But in order to grieve differently, our grief must be paired with the knowledge of how Christ’s death and resurrection affect those who have died in the faith.

The Thessalonians wanted to know what would happen to believers who die before Christ’s Second Coming. Paul’s

reassuring answer was that the Thessalonians would see them again. The dead in Christ will return with Christ. This is a miraculous work of God. It is important to note that this is a hope that belongs only to those who have been joined to Christ by faith in His death and resurrection. If we are not trusting in Christ for forgiveness and eternal life, we “have no hope” in death.

I am the  
resurrection and  
the life. Anyone  
who believes in  
me will live, even  
though they die.

John 11:25

Those who are united with Christ by faith belong to Christ. They also belong with Christ. Before His suffering Jesus prayed, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:24). As the Heidelberg Catechism states, my hope in death is this: “That I am not my own, but that I belong—in body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

### Apply the Word

Grief is a struggle, even for those who have a strong faith. Grief is an emotional state. Faith is a conviction grounded in the truth that God has revealed. If you are grieving today, you may want to express your feelings to God in writing like C. S. Lewis. Faith will remind you of your hope, and hope will strengthen you in grief.

### Pray with Us

Please pray for our students at Moody as they make their plans for the next school year. May God give them a refreshing summer and exciting ministry opportunities, whether in their hometowns or overseas.

## Hope and Resurrection

The Christmas carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” was written by the nineteenth-century American preacher Phillips Brooks after he visited the Holy Land. One of its verses describes the relative obscurity of Christ’s first coming and compares it with the mystery of the new birth: “How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given!” When Jesus gathers the church to Himself, the scene will be different. Christ’s coming for His own will be announced with a shout (literally a “command”), the voice of the archangel, and a trumpet blast. These elements accompanied an imperial visit from the Roman emperor, and Old Testament passages include these descriptions when God reveals His presence to His people (see Ex. 19:16; Ps. 47:5).

The Lord Himself will “come down from heaven” (v. 16). This kind of language speaks of a concrete event rather than a spiritual or philosophical idea. Christ’s vic-

tory will not be simply the triumph of His ideas over all other faith systems. It will be a victory of His person—His literal embodied self—over His enemies. Jesus will come in the flesh to claim His own. This is what the angels promised the disciples when they watched Jesus ascend into heaven from the Mount of Olives. “This

same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

This divine event follows an ordered sequence. First, believers who have died

will be resurrected and caught up to meet Christ. Paul emphasized this to reassure those in Thessalonica who were afraid that believers who already died might be overlooked. Then those who are alive will be “caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (v. 17). These two dimensions are part of the same event.

By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

1 Corinthians 6:14

### Apply the Word

Paul makes it clear that this “blessed hope” belongs only to those who are “in Christ.” It is the “dead in Christ” and those who are in Christ but are “still alive” who will meet Christ in the air. If you have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ for eternal life, turn to Him today. This hope can be yours!

### Pray with Us

Would you pray for Moody’s Student Development team in Chicago, as they prepare to welcome the new class of Moody students? Specifically, pray for Tim Arens, dean of students, who interacts with students and encourages them daily.

## Hope and Expectation

The arrival of the President of the United States at formal functions is often announced by the anthem “Hail to the Chief.” Many Americans are familiar with the tune but they may not know that the song also has lyrics. The title comes from *The Lady of the Lake*, a poem by Sir Walter Scott. James Sanderson adapted a portion of the poem for a play by using an old Scottish tune. In the twentieth century, Albert Gamse used the title phrase and melody as a basis for the American anthem.

Paul warns that Christ’s Second Coming will come suddenly and without fanfare. Jesus’ return will be preceded by a period of divine judgment that will take the world by surprise. The phrase “the day of the Lord” appears throughout Scripture, especially in the Old Testament prophets, in contexts that speak of judgment (cf. Isa. 13:6, 9; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:11; 3:14; Amos 5:18–20; Obad. 1:15; Zeph. 1:7, 14). This “day”

really refers to a series of events that includes Christ’s return and final judgment.

This will come like a thief who breaks in while the homeowner is asleep. Jesus used similar language in Matthew 24:1–14 when the disciples asked about the sign of His coming and the end of the age. He

warned of a coming time of “great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again” (Matt. 24:21). People will believe they are in a position of peace and safety, even as destruction comes upon them (v. 3).

I will send the  
prophet Elijah to  
you before that  
great and dreadful  
day of the  
LORD comes.

Malachi 4:5

Jesus warned that it would be like the days of Noah: “For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:38–39).

### Apply the Word

People have wondered about the timing of these events for generations. But those who have trusted in Jesus Christ and take God at His word have no need to worry about “times and dates.” They are waiting for the Father to send His Son from heaven and rescue them from the coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:10). This is part of the blessed hope that comes from trusting in Jesus.

### Pray with Us

Paul Santhouse, vice president of Publishing, requests your prayers for the teams he leads at Moody Publishers, that through every word they print, Christ will be lifted up and lives will be changed.

# Question and Answer

By Mike Kellogg, Moody Radio Host



**Why is it that many pro-life advocates often support the death penalty? They are opposed**

**to killing an unborn baby, but they have no problem killing criminals. And then some pro-choice advocates have no problem destroying a fetus, but they can't stand the thought of giving a murderer his just deserts. In those cases, they look more "pro-life."**



Well, first let me say that the Bible is pro-life. It certainly does not condone the aborting of an unborn baby. God sees life as precious. Yet God has given to government the ability to enforce capital punishment. Old Testament law went so far as to give the nation the right to execute not only murderers but also adulterers, those who abuse their parents, rebellious children, people who intentionally violated the Sabbath, and the various and sundry things as well. The New Testament, however, doesn't explicitly discuss the death penalty, but it does state that God has established governments and given them the authority to make decisions that individuals do not have. The right to inflict death on murderers was never given to individuals but only to governments who ultimately will be held accountable to God. As individuals we are not to kill or inflict vengeance—including the lives of the unborn or those who have committed crimes or harmed others in some way.



**Why do so many young people seem to be angry today? I read constantly of young children and teenagers vandalizing**

**schools, overturning gravestones, taking rifles and knives into schools, and sadly even committing murder. Where does all this anger come from?**



We have a tendency to forget that the sin principle that rules on the earth touches even young children as well. But beyond that, you are right. Many young people are angry. Some are angry because they have believed what parents have emphasized—that they can do anything and be anything they want. They are special. Mom, dad, or grandma has convinced them they are the greatest. They are brilliant; they are the best, most talented kid in the world.

After a while the kids believe it, but when they begin to express themselves, articulate their thoughts, take the tests, or audition they discover that while those who love them think they are super, no one else does. These kids are angry. They are not special to anyone but mom and dad. They have been sold a bill of goods. Our aim as parents should be to encourage our kids to be the best that they can be as creations of God—to work to improve the talents they do have.

*Continued on next page*

## If you really want to know God, you need to study His own revelation of Himself through His Word.

*Continued from previous page*



**I have always thought of God as someone who is on His throne in heaven counting all the things**

**I've done, keeping track of all the good and the bad things. I've been a Christian for five years, and I know that I'm saved and His blood has cleansed me of all my sin, but I still see Him as counting every single sin I commit, looking for every flaw, uncovering another crime I've fallen into. How do I change how I feel about my relationship with God?**



You are not alone. Many sincere believers have a wrong concept of God. They have carried all that they believed about God before their salvation into their lives today as believers. The basic problem is that they are looking to the wrong source for really knowing God and what we can expect of Him and what He expects of us. If you really want to know God, you need to study His own revelation of Himself through His Word, the Bible. Isaiah tells us that God is powerful, He is our Helper “who gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (40:29). God revealed the depths of His love when He became Incarnate and dwelt among us as Jesus Christ the Lord. As we read the Bible each day, we will see new and yet eternal descriptions of God that we have never comprehended before. Reading the Bible should always include the question, “What does this Scripture say to us about God, and what does

He expect us to do about it now?” Coming to know God as He really is presents one of the richest blessings that will transform our lives!



**Leviticus 1:8 says that God hates child sacrifice. If that is true, why did He sacrifice His only Son?**



The crucifixion of Jesus is very different from child sacrifice. Jesus is God's Son, but He chose to go to the cross. He submitted Himself to do the Father's will. Unlike the pagans who gave up firstborn sons in order to have good weather for their crops, Jesus' death achieved far greater blessings than material gain. The pagans made sacrifices to nonexistent deities or idols; Jesus tasted death so that we could know a relationship and fellowship with a holy God who loves us.

God redeemed sinners with His own blood, through Jesus Christ, His Son. Jesus took the penalty for the sins of the world through His death. Only Jesus, who is both fully God and fully man, could accomplish that. In that sense the death of Jesus was unlike any other sacrifice. And most importantly, unlike any pagan child sacrifice, God raised Jesus from the dead after three days. The resurrection of Jesus proves that His death was not a hopeless attempt to appease a false idol—His death was an act of faith and obedience that pleased God who raised Him. The death and resurrection of Jesus made possible the salvation of all humanity.

## Living with the End in View

“Doomsday preppers” are people who take measures, some of them extreme, to prepare for widespread disaster. They expect civilization as we know it to collapse. Some stockpile freeze-dried food, water purification devices, and even weapons. Their goal is to be self-sufficient when “the big one” hits. The Apostle took a different approach. For Paul living with the end in view requires spiritual vigilance and self-control more than stockpiling.

Paul contrasts the children of light with those who “belong to the night.” Those who are “of the day” are alert and self-controlled (v. 5). Those who belong to the night engage in practices consistent with the domain of darkness. This figurative language highlights the difference between those who expect Christ to return and those who do not. The expectation of Christ’s return and the certainty of coming judgment should not drive us into isolation or self-centered living. We prepare by “putting on faith and love as a

breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet” (v. 8).

Those who belong to Christ do not need to be afraid of the future. They can approach the end with a sense of confidence because they know that they have not been appointed to endure the wrath of God to

come upon the world. Such confidence is not a mark of self-complacency or conceit. It is the result of faith. Jesus is what separates the children of light from those who belong to the domain of darkness.

Everyone who has received salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ is appointed to salvation. Some in the Thessalonian church had been worried about those who would die before Christ’s return. Paul assured them that there was no need for concern. Whether we are alive (“awake”) or dead (“asleep”) our destiny is to live with Christ. This certainty is both a source of comfort and a motivation for holy living.

Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

2 Peter 3:14

### Apply the Word

If we have the hope of Christ, we do not need to speculate about the future. We already know enough to be prepared, and so we don’t need to be afraid. Jesus frees us from the “everyone for himself” mentality that is reflected in much of doomsday culture. Those who live with the end in view bear witness to the hope of Christ and build one another up.

### Pray with Us

Michele Forrider, René Hanebutt, James Hathaway, and Deborah Keiser work hard at Moody Publishers in Chicago to extend our publishing outreach to new audiences. They will appreciate the prayers of the *Today in the Word* community.

## The Church and Its Leaders

Some estimates conclude that one out of four pastors has been forcibly terminated by their church at some point during their career. In most cases these forced terminations are the result of personality conflicts or differences over ministry vision. They are rarely a result of moral failure or doctrinal deviation. The church does not always get along with its leaders.

This is not a new problem; the same was true in Paul's day. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12, Paul tells the church how it should view its leaders. This relationship should be characterized by respect. Three phrases describe the ministry of these church leaders. First, it is hard work. Church leadership is demanding. The Greek verb in verse 12 was used at the time to refer to manual labor. Few church members know all that is involved in this kind of ministry. Many think that their pastor only works for a few hours on Sunday. They do not see the time spent in prayer, sermon preparation, counseling, and leadership.

Remember your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.

Hebrews 13:17

The second phrase Paul uses to describe the work of church leaders emphasizes their spiritual authority. They “care for you in the Lord.” This language connotes spiritual responsibility rather than ownership or control. The church's leaders are servants, not dictators. They do not own the congregation, and the church does not “employ” the pastor. The pastor is a servant of Christ. Church leaders are placed in the church the way a caretaker might have responsibility to care for a household that belongs to someone else. This means that ministry is stewardship more than it is an exercise of political power.

The third phrase Paul uses indicates that this work of leadership is personal. He describes these church leaders as those “who admonish you.” This is a ministry of the word and of pastoral concern. A pastor's work is the care of souls, and verse 13 reveals that the church also has a responsibility to care for its pastors.

### Apply the Word

Pray for each of your church's leaders by name. Pray for their endurance, spiritual health, family, and relationships. Ask God to help your church live in peace with one another. Then think of some concrete way to show your high regard for their work, perhaps with an encouraging post on your favorite social media platform or a note with a gift card for a special dinner.

### Pray with Us

Please pray for Natalie Mills, John Hinkley, Randall Payleitner, Duane Sherman, and Zack Williamson from Moody Publishers. Ask the Lord to give them wisdom, to be “taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:13).

## Community and Accountability

A popular African proverb says, “It takes a whole village to raise a child.” Based on today’s reading, we might suggest another: “It takes a whole church to disciple a Christian.” Community is an important value for most congregations. Many use small groups to make this a reality. But in his book *The Search to Belong*, author Joseph Myers observes that our small-group models often encourage *forced* belonging: “We surmise that putting people into groups will alleviate the emptiness so prevalent in our fast-paced culture.” Instead, Myers suggests that we focus on creating environments that allow people naturally to connect.

Today’s passage reveals some of the characteristics of this kind of healthy environment. Paul does not command a particular organizational structure. Instead, he describes a variety of actions and dispositions. They include warning, encouragement, support, patience, and kindness. The list is attractive. Who would

not want to be part of a church whose culture was characterized by these traits? Yet this list also implies that the community we call “church” includes those who are lazy, timid, irritating, and who sometimes take advantage of one another.

The church we long for is an ideal church, where the worship is always meaningful and everyone gets along. The church of our experience is something else. It is not an ideal community but a kind of laboratory, where Christ allows us to experience grace and transformation within the context of real relationships. Often these relationships are strained because of sin.

The remedy Paul prescribes is multifaceted. Sometimes it calls for our courageous confrontation that holds others accountable for their actions. At other times it requires mercy and patience as we bear with one another. Either course of action must be undertaken with a sense of our own sinfulness and need for grace.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:18

### Apply the Word

Sometimes it helps to visualize where the spaces for relationship exist in your church. One way to do this is through creating a relational map of these spaces, and see how they are related to one another. After you have identified as many relational spaces as you can think of, label them with the various actions Paul mentions in today’s reading. What does your community look like?

### Pray with Us

Would you uphold in prayer Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media? Pray that using Greg’s leadership, the Lord will continue to open new ways to spread His Word, praise Him, and proclaim the gospel through the media.

## Hope and Joy

The much-loved chorus of the hymn “At the Cross” declares: “At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light, / And the burden of my heart rolled away. / It was there by faith I received my sight, / And now I am happy all the day.” This refrain was added to Isaac Watts’s hymn “Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed” by Ralph Hudson because he wasn’t satisfied with the conclusion of the original. Some find the sentiment of the added chorus out of step with their experience (and it changes melody from the original hymn), however, because few Christians experience constant happiness.

Rejoice in the Lord  
always. I will say it  
again: Rejoice!

Philippians 4:4

depends upon a variety of factors resulting from circumstances that are beyond our control. The kind of rejoicing that Paul speaks of here is an act of attention. It is an expression of faith and an affirmation of God’s goodness.

Rejoicing is linked with two other intentional acts in these verses. Paul also urged his church in Thessalonica to “pray continually” and “give thanks in all circumstances.” Both are acts of faith, but each has a slightly different focus. In prayer we make known those things that we need or want from God.

It is faith expressed in the terms of expectation. When we give thanks, we surrender to God’s disposition of our circumstances. This is faith expressed in terms of submission. When we give thanks in every circumstance we acknowledge that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

Paul’s admonition in today’s reading is not to be “happy all the day” but to “rejoice always.” Is there a difference between the two? One distinction is the injunction in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 does not refer to an individual emotional state but to a corporate act. This is a call to corporate worship rather than a command to feel a certain way. What we call “happiness” is usually an emotional affect or consequence that

### Apply the Word

If your emotional state makes it hard to rejoice in the Lord today, use a concordance or Bible software to look up all the instances in the Psalms where the word *rejoice* can be found. How many different reasons or circumstances can you find? Even when we do not enjoy our circumstances, we have many reasons to rejoice in the Lord.

### Pray with Us

Today we invite you to pray for Moody Radio South (WMFT) broadcasting from Northport, AL. Many Christians are encouraged due to the service of the station’s staff: Rob Moore, Patrick Bosley, and John Rogers.

## Don't and Do

Some describe Christianity as a religion of do's and don'ts. But this is not entirely true. Yes, the Bible is filled with commands and prohibitions. Followers of Jesus Christ are often distinguished from those who are not by their actions. But our status as children of God is not based on personal performance. Eternal life is a gift that is received by faith and the result of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. The do's and don'ts of the Christian life are a response to this gift and an expression of our faith.

Today's reading lists several important and possibly puzzling commands and prohibitions. The first is a warning not to quench the Spirit or treat prophecies with contempt. These prohibitions are combined with a command to test everything and hold on to what is good. Taken together, these don'ts and do's describe Paul's balanced approach to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Discernment was needed to distinguish between

those who genuinely spoke on God's behalf from others who spoke of their own accord (1 Cor. 14:29).

Today we have the gift of the completed canon of Scripture, which is the primary way that the Holy Spirit speaks to us. Like the Thessalonians, we have an obligation to open our hearts to the things the Spirit may be saying to us through those who proclaim God's Word.

For God is not a  
God of disorder but  
of peace—as in all  
the congregations  
of the Lord's people.

1 Corinthians 14:33

We also have a responsibility to test what we hear. We do this by comparing what is preached to what God has revealed in the Word (cf. Deut. 13:1–4).

Every believer has the Holy Spirit who helps us understand the significance of what God has revealed in the Bible (Rom. 8:9; 1 John 2:20, 27). As we give attention to God's Word, He will help us to discern between good teaching and bad. This is how we avoid "every kind of evil" (v. 22).

### Apply the Word

Would you like to know more about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the present age? Read John Stott's *Baptism and the Fullness: The Holy Spirit's Work Today* (IVP). To learn more about the Holy Spirit's involvement in the inspiration of Scripture, read *Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture* by R. Laird Harris (Wipf & Stock). Both books are available online or from your Christian bookstore.

### Pray with Us

As we lift up in prayer Moody Radio Florida (WRMB) and its ministry of bringing the saving message of Jesus to the hearts of listeners, thank God for Dolores King-St. George, Audrey Altman, Rebecca Borgstrom, Eric Johnson, and Brigitte Sylvestre.

## Ultimate Hope

Few words have the power to strike fear into the heart of a child like the phrase, “Wait until your father gets home!” This is something we usually hear only after we have broken the lamp or dented the car’s fender. This warning has the ring of final judgment. Eventually Dad will come home, and there will be a reckoning.

For the Christian, however, the prospect of standing before our heavenly Father is much different. The apostle Paul describes final judgment as an event that we can eagerly anticipate rather than something we should dread. This is only possible because of who God is. He is the “God of peace” (v. 23). This does not refer to an inner emotional state but to the nature of our relationship with Him. God took the initiative to make peace with us by sending His Son to die and rise again for our sins. We have peace with God through Christ (Rom. 5:1).

The God of peace  
be with you all.

Amen.

Romans 15:33

Our peace treaty with God is more than a paper declaration. Since sin was at the root of our broken relationship, Christ’s work has dealt fully with sin. The believer will be able to face God without dread on the Day of Judgment because each one has been made blameless through the work of Jesus. And verse 23 promises more than forgiveness of sin. It describes a complete transformation, a purification “through and through.”

In the Christian life, holiness is a gift before it is a practice. We must be made holy before we can live holy lives. We can depend upon

God to finish the work that He has begun in us. The God who has made peace with us through Christ will enable us to stand before Him without shame or fear. This truth is what allows us to have hope, both in God’s work in our lives today and in the salvation He has promised in the future.

### Apply the Word

Can you honestly say that you are looking forward to final judgment? If you are uncertain about how you will fare on that day, it may be an indication that you do not know where you stand with Christ. If you are uncertain call (800) DL MOODY and someone will be happy to share how you can know today that you have peace with God.

### Pray with Us

Please include in your prayers Moody’s VP and chief operating officer, Steven Mogck. Ask for God’s help and guidance in all the decisions he makes daily at Moody, as well as for a good teamwork among all the departments he leads.

## Mutual Hope

Many churches post greeters at the door to welcome visitors. This ministry usually involves a smile, a handshake, and some expression of appreciation for attending. How would you feel if next Sunday the greeter welcomed you with a kiss instead of a handshake? Paul describes kissing as an appropriate form of Christian greeting in four of his letters (see Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2Cor. 13:12; 1Thess. 5:26). Peter echoes this command (1 Peter 5:14).

In his book *Ancient Christian Worship*, Andrew B. McGowan observes, “Membership in the Christian community brought believers into a relationship like that of family members, although no one precedent or model explains the prominence of Christians’ kissing. It was a reworking of an existing practice or convention, for the new purposes of a genuinely new social grouping.” By the middle of the second century, kissing was a feature of the church’s liturgy of worship, linked with prayer and the

observance of the Lord’s Supper. The kiss was a social formality but was intended to convey important spiritual truths about the relationship believers have with one another.

Paul’s closing commands in this letter emphasize mutuality. The Thessalonians had certainly benefited from Paul’s ministry, but he was also dependent upon them for prayer. The church’s “holy kiss” was a tangible reminder of the bond that knits all believers together. The command that this letter should be read to all underscored Paul’s apostolic authority as well as the church’s

Each of you must  
put off falsehood  
and speak truthfully  
to your neighbor,  
for we are all  
members of  
one body.

Ephesians 4:25

responsibility to be a community under the Word.

In many of today’s churches, the function of a greeter is to make visitors welcome. They send a message of invitation to those who are not yet a part of the church. In the ancient church, the holy kiss was a sign to those who were already in the community.

### Apply the Word

The early church adapted the practice of kissing to communicate something about relationships in the church. In addition to a warm handshake and friendly greeting, can you think of other ways your church can make people feel welcome and demonstrate the bond shared in Christ? Perhaps inviting someone to share coffee or lunch after a service could extend Christian hospitality and love.

### Pray with Us

For the next three days, please pray for one of the teams in Information Technology Services, led by Ben Dallmann. It provides computer support for our employees and today, Steven Takushi, Michael Paniak, and Rich McNeill will appreciate your prayers.

## Hope and Suffering

The early church leader Tertullian declared that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” But recent research has challenged this notion. In an article in *Christianity Today* entitled, “Sorry, Tertullian,” author Morgan Lee points to research that challenges the notion that persecution strengthens the church. We should not be troubled by this. The Bible never says that persecution is good for the church. It does say that Christians can be strong despite persecution.

The experience of the Thessalonian church is proof that persecution can have a mixed effect. In his opening remarks to the letter, the Apostle thanked God for the growing faith of this church. They had increased in their understanding of the truth and in their love for one another. When Paul recounted the story of the Thessalonian church to others, he pointed to them as an example of persistent faith in a difficult environment. But the experience of persecution

also sparked questions about the future and what they believed.

In verse 4 Paul uses two related terms to describe the kind of suffering the Thessalonian church faced. The first is a word that is commonly translated “persecution.” Persecution is suffering inflicted on the church from the outside. The fact that Paul uses the plural form may underscore its intensity. This was more than a general sense of opposition but repeated persecution.

The other word, translated “trials,” is broader. It can refer to oppression or various kinds of affliction.

Persecution brings with it a host of problems. The troubles that the Thessalonians faced were both external and internal. Their faith was met with fierce opposition, and this revealed cracks in the spiritual infrastructure of the church. Fissures included issues of faith and of practice. In general, however, the Apostle’s assessment was upbeat.

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 Timothy 3:12

### Apply the Word

Do you know believers who maintain faith despite difficulty? Maybe it’s someone who is the only Christian in the family or a loved one who maintains a good reputation on the job despite ridicule and pressure to compromise. Tell them how you see evidence that God is at work in their lives. It may be just the encouragement they need to persevere.

### Pray with Us

Keeping in prayer IT Services on our Chicago campus, please add to your prayer list Jim Anderson, Tim Canfield, Debbie Ellis, and Bob Rutherford who provide desktop support for the staff and help faculty optimize the learning process.

## Hope and Judgment

The playwright and novelist Sir Walter Scott called revenge, “the sweetest morsel to the mouth that ever was cooked in hell.” The Bible speaks of the danger of seeking revenge in both the Old and the New Testaments. For example, Leviticus 19:18 warns, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” Similarly, Proverbs 24:29 warns, “Do not say, ‘I’ll do to them as they have done to me; I’ll pay them back for what they did.’” Paul echoes these sentiments in Romans 12:19: “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

Is Paul contradicting this counsel in today’s reading? No: the Apostle does not encourage the Thessalonians to take matters into their own hands and seek revenge for the persecutions they have

suffered. He does assure them that God will “pay back trouble to those who trouble you” (v. 6). What is in view here is justice, not vengeance. What is the difference? It has to do with the one who executes the sentence. Vengeance belongs to God because He is the only one who can execute vengeance justly. Our desire for justice is tainted by sin, and our ability to mete it out is hindered by our limited perspective.

And will not God  
bring about justice  
for his chosen ones,  
who cry out to him  
day and night?

Luke 18:7

These words, which were meant to comfort persecuted believers, might disturb many who do not consider themselves Christians (and perhaps even some who do). They describe a terrifying punishment that will come upon those who refuse to embrace the gospel. This punishment is described as “everlasting destruction” and being “shut out from the presence of the Lord” (v. 9). Those who persecute the church demonstrate that they have rejected God first.

### Apply the Word

The biblical doctrine of God’s condemnation is not a comfortable one, but it is necessary for our understanding of God. Mercy presumes judgment. Grace is necessary because of divine justice. Mercy and grace meet God’s just judgment in the person of Christ who suffered for our sins. To reject Christ is to reject mercy, and to reject mercy is to reject God Himself and make yourself His enemy.

### Pray with Us

Concluding our prayer time for the IT Services’ specialists, please ask God to bless the work at Moody of Andy Thisse, Greg Skorik, and Josue Reyes, as they help at events and in the classrooms with audio/visual equipment and “smart desks.”

## A Hope of Being Worthy

When Jane's boys were small, she always said the same thing to them when they went out to play: "Remember who you belong to!" Identity shapes behavior. This truth underlies passages that call believers to live in a way that is "worthy of the calling" (Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12). This does not mean that God's call depends upon the way we live; rather, it is the other way around. We live the way we do because we remember that we belong to Christ.

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians was that God might make them "worthy of his calling" (v. 11). The prayer assumes both that the calling has already occurred and that God is the one who enables them to live up to it. The aim of Paul's petition is that their lives would reflect their calling. But the fact that he had to pray for this indicates that being worthy of our calling requires something more than mere effort.

The same God who called us must also work in us to make us worthy.

This does not imply that we are passive or uninvolved in our sanctification. The Christian life demands a place for the exercise of our will and for action. Yet both require the power of God. If walking worthy was

simply a matter of adding effort to faith, prayer would not be needed. The Thessalonians might need information or rebuke, but Paul would have no reason to speak to God in prayer about them.

We may purpose to do good, but God's power alone can enable us to ful-

fill that purpose. We can act, but it is only when our actions are prompted by faith that God is pleased with them. Walking worthy is not about us. Those who walk worthy of their calling discover that Christ is being glorified in them. A worthy walk is a work of God.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Ephesians 4:1

### Apply the Word

Do you feel like you fall short of God's calling? The solution may lie not in trying harder but in trusting more. Whose power are you relying on to live the Christian life? Ask God to help you rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to follow through on your "good purpose" to live for Jesus today.

### Pray with Us

Dr. James Spencer, VP and dean of Moody Distance Learning, welcomes your prayers for the development of Moody's online and regional classrooms education, ensuring that every learner across the globe receives solid biblical teaching.

## Hope and Truth

If you have an email account, at some point you have probably received a message from an impostor. Perhaps someone claimed to have inherited a large fortune and wanted your help converting the currency. It may have been a message that appeared to be from your bank or credit card company warning about a problem with your account and then requesting personal information. Or it might have come from someone pretending to be lonely who wanted to strike up a conversation.

The Thessalonians did not have access to a computer, but they shared a similar experience. Paul wrote this letter because someone had misinformed the church about the “coming” of Christ and “our being gathered to him” (v. 1). As we saw in Paul’s previous letter to the Thessalonians, this was a concern about the timing of Christ’s return—but with a slightly different spin. In 1 Thessalonians,

the worry was that believers who already died would miss out on Jesus’ coming (1 Thess. 4:15). This time the concern was that Jesus had already come and everyone had missed out. The church was troubled because those who had communicated this error claimed to be speaking for God and in Paul’s name.

**This is the last hour;  
and as you have  
heard that the  
antichrist is coming,  
even now  
many antichrists  
have come.**

1 John 2:18

Paul quickly reassured his readers that the Second Coming had not yet taken place. This could not have happened because two key prophetic events had not yet taken place. The “rebellion” had not yet occurred and the “man of lawlessness” had not been revealed (v. 3). This

mysterious figure is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (Dan. 9:26; Rev. 13:1–10, 18). He is also called the Antichrist (1 John 2:18). He will be God’s enemy and will even claim to be God. Jesus warned that this man’s coming would inaugurate a time of “great distress” (Matt. 24:21).

### Apply the Word

Not everyone who claims to speak for God can be trusted. That is especially true of those who claim to have special knowledge of the future. The only reliable information about God’s plans for the present and the future can come from the Bible. Beware of those who say that they have information about the future that the Bible has not clearly revealed.

### Pray with Us

Please focus your prayers on the Digital Marketing team, tirelessly working to communicate information about Moody Global Ministries via websites, emails, and on social media. Thank you for praying for Adam Grandy, Courtney Gaines, and Chris Burdick.

## Hope and God's Timing

Christians and others have a long and unfortunate history of attempting to identify the Antichrist. Down through the ages he has been identified with religious leaders, political figures, and pop icons. But Paul's purpose in this section is to reassure rather than fill in the details with photographic detail. He does not provide a name or physical description. He does make it clear that these events will unfold according to God's timetable.

Paul's main message to the Thessalonians was that the "man of lawlessness" had not arrived on the scene. But the forces that will ultimately produce the Antichrist were already at work. The coming "rebellion" predicted in verse 3 is really a culmination of the ancient rebellion instigated by Satan at the beginning of time (see Luke 10:18; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:4). The spirit of this rebellion is already at work in the world today (1 John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). Paul calls this "the secret power of lawlessness" in verse 7.

**It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.**

Acts 1:7

If allowed, Satan would have already imposed his agenda on world events. Thankfully, a power even greater than Satan restrains his evil agenda. Although many have come in the spirit of Antichrist, the man of lawlessness has not yet appeared because something "holds it back" (v. 6). This restraining force is the power of God, and the critical factor is a matter of timing.

Unlike many who have written about the Antichrist after him, Paul's approach is not speculative. His tone is confident, and his aim is to reassure—not alarm—his readers. We do not have to be anxious about these events because God is in control. The spirit of Antichrist will be kept at bay until the time is right. Only then will the identity of the Antichrist be made clear. Furthermore, his fate is as inevitable as his appearance. He is the one "whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming" (v. 8).

### Apply the Word

Perhaps it is not so surprising that the church has misidentified the Antichrist down through the centuries since the secret power of lawlessness is already at work in the world. But instead of watching these events and speculating, we would do better to view them as evidence of God's unfolding plan. We have no need to fear or to speculate. We know who is in control.

### Pray with Us

Today and tomorrow, we again lift up Digital Marketing in prayer, thanking God for the expertise and positive attitude that Caleb Durenberger, Noelle Bud, David Quigley, and Bryan Young demonstrate in the workplace.

## False Hope

Frank Abagnale Jr., the subject of the film *Catch Me if You Can*, was one of the most successful counterfeiters in history. Not only did Abagnale write over \$2.5 billion dollars in forged checks, he also counterfeited himself by assuming several identities. Abagnale posed as an airline pilot, attorney, college professor, and a pediatrician. Today he is an author, lecturer, and consultant who works with banks, governments, and corporations to protect themselves against fraud.

Satan is the master counterfeiter. One key characteristic of the Antichrist's appearance will be "all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders" (v. 9). These will actually be the work of Satan. Signs and wonders accompanied Jesus' ministry and authenticated the message of the Apostles (Heb. 2:4). When God used signs to prove that Moses was His authorized messenger, Satan empowered the Egyptian magicians to mimic those miracles (Ex.

4:21; 7:11). These works were not magic in the modern sense of that word, merely a matter of sleight of hand or visual trickery. The signs performed by the Antichrist will also be genuine miracles like those performed by Pharaoh's magicians.

**For false messiahs  
and false prophets  
will appear and  
perform great signs  
and wonders to  
deceive, if possible,  
even the elect.**

Matthew 24:24

The false signs of the Antichrist will deceive those who have not believed the truth of the gospel. This will be a form of divine judgment. Because they "refused to love the truth and so be saved," God will not force them to believe but will send them "a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie" (vv. 10–11). This seems harsh to some today. But as C. S. Lewis observed, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell." God sends them a delusion because they prefer it over His truth.

### Apply the Word

Today's passage is a solemn reminder of how dangerous it is to reject God's truth. Those who refuse to love the truth may find that their wish has been granted. But there is also hope. In this battle between truth and lies, God is clearly the greater power. Do you know someone who has refused to accept the gospel? Pray that God will open their eyes and their heart to embrace its truth.

### Pray with Us

As we conclude our prayer time for the Digital Marketing team in Chicago, please remember Nathan Hill, Brian Ixcaragua, Jane Chao, and Rachel Strull during your time with God. Pray that the Lord would bless and multiply the fruits of their work.

## The Hope of Christ

Which state has the most earthquakes? If you guessed California, you would be wrong. California ranks second. The state with most earthquakes last year was Alaska. In regions that are prone to earthquakes, states often require builders to take special measures. They want to be as certain as possible that when the foundations are shaken the structure will still stand.

Paul was confident about the Thessalonians because they had a solid spiritual foundation. Their faith was grounded on God's call and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (vv. 13–14). Paul's view of how we experience salvation was both theocentric (God-centered) and Trinitarian. God was the one who initiates the process by His choice. That choice was put into effect through the preaching of the gospel and the working of the Holy Spirit. The aim of God's calling the Thessalonians in this way was so that they might share in the glory of Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation.

Hebrews 6:9

Paul's theology of salvation also emphasized human responsibility. Those who experienced God's call through Paul's gospel had an obligation to respond. God initiated the encounter, but they were responsible for how they responded to the gospel. Human responsibility is underscored in the two related commands in verse 15 that urged the Thessalonians to "stand firm" and "hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you." These teachings took two forms. They came to the Thessalonian church "by word of mouth" and "by letter" (v. 15).

Apostolic teaching comes to us today in the same two modes. The Apostles are no longer here to teach by word of mouth, but we have their testimony recorded in Scripture. We are to test the preaching we hear by what is written in God's Word. God holds us accountable for how we hear these truths, but He also encourages our hearts and strengthens our obedience.

### Apply the Word

God's grace does not allow us to take credit for our spiritual progress, but it also leaves no room for complacency. God calls us through the ministry of the Word and builds us up in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our responsibility is to stand firm and hold to the truth. Use the words of verses 16 and 17 as the basis of your prayer today.

### Pray with Us

Janet Stiven, vice president and general counsel, welcomes your prayers for her and her team. Pray that all Moody's legal matters would continue to be handled with integrity and godliness, for God's glory.

## Hope and Prayer

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin pointed to the Psalms as an example of persistence in prayer. Calvin observes, “For in the Psalms we can often see that David and other believers, when they are almost worn out with praying and seem to have beaten the air with their prayers as if pouring forth words to a deaf God, still do not cease to pray.” What is it that keeps us praying, even when it seems as if God has turned a deaf ear? It is our conviction that the God who can grant our request is also a God who hears us.

Paul urged the believers in Thessalonica to pray for the progress of the gospel and for the response of those who heard its message. He expected God to provide opportunities for him to share the good news. He also believed that God could move in the hearts of those who heard so that they would honor its message. The request in the original Greek text could be translated

as that the word of the Lord “will run and be glorified” (v. 1). He imagined the gospel being victorious, crowned like a runner who wins a race. This expectation came partly from personal experience. Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray that God would work in others as He had already worked in them.

Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Luke 18:1

He also requested prayers for his protection. The grammatical construction suggests that the Apostle had a specific group of “wicked and evil people” in mind.

Paul concludes his requests with a prayer of his own, prefaced by an affirmation of his confidence that they would continue to be obedient to the faith. This was an expression of confidence in God who can direct the heart. This kind of confidence is the secret to perseverance in prayer. A prayer is not a wish, it is a request. Prayer assumes that God hears us and has the power to grant what we ask.

### Apply the Word

Have you been praying for a family member or a friend who does not know Christ? Do not give up. Keep praying for those you love, confident that your heavenly Father has heard your request and can “direct” their hearts “into God’s love.” Allow Him to answer according to His own timetable. If you have begun to doubt God’s ability, remember what He has done in your own life.

### Pray with Us

We have the privilege to pray for the staff of our Campus Post Office: Tony Harper, Michael Lathrop, Victor Perez, Samuel Ramos, Richard Tatina, and Jenny Matthews. Ask God for good teamwork, joy, and peace in their service.

## Hope and Work

Eugene Peterson's father was a butcher. "I always thought of my father as a priest," Peterson writes. "He wore a white butcher's apron as he presided over the work of slaughtering heifers and pigs, dressing them out, cutting them up." For Peterson, the butcher shop did not seem that different from the place of worship. It was filled with the same people and had the same easygoing atmosphere.

Tom works in a factory. Mary is a nurse. Jeff serves as a pastor. Whose work is more spiritual? If all of life belongs to God, then the answer is that each of these vocations has spiritual significance in the eyes of God.

Work is the ordinary means God uses to supply what we need to live. The Apostle emphasizes the central place of work in the life of the believer when he appeals to this general rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (v. 10). The church

has a responsibility to care for those who are unable to provide for themselves (see Gal. 2:19; James 1:27; Acts 6:1–6). But the church should also expect its members to live responsibly. While not everyone can work, those who can should. In this way God provides for us and enables us to help those who are genuinely in need.

Therefore I urge  
you to imitate me.

1 Corinthians 4:16

Some in Thessalonica were taking advantage of the church's generosity. Instead of working, they were "idle" (v. 11). Paul employs a play on words in the Greek text describing those who are "not working at all" as busybodies (literally: those

who "work intrusively"). Those who are idle are not necessarily inactive—they often occupy themselves with the wrong things and disrupt the community of believers. The solution to idleness is not just a job but working responsibly. Paul commands idlers to "settle down and earn the food they eat" (v. 12).

### Apply the Word

The attitude in which you carry out your work and the quality of your workmanship matters to God. Give thanks for your job today. Thank the Lord for providing this way to labor productively and responsibly, and ask God to help you honor Him through it. Your work will sometimes make you weary, but do not grow tired of doing good.

### Pray with Us

Tuition-paid Christian education at Moody wouldn't be possible without faithful giving of our friends. Please pray for Jim Elliott, VP of Stewardship, so that through him and his teams Moody's connection with our donors would grow stronger.

## Hope and Discipline

Many churches have a sign out front that says, “The Friendly Church.” But it is doubtful that anyone has seen a church whose sign boasts, “We discipline our members.” The notion of church discipline, in which a church corrects and even expels members who sin but refuse to repent, seems out of step with the times to many.

Paul concluded this letter by reminding the Thessalonians to take note of those who ignored his instructions and to avoid those people. The goal for this kind of treatment may shock us. The aim was to shame those who were disobedient. Such a strategy seems unduly harsh to many Christians today. After all, hasn’t the church been called to reach out to sinners? Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). But what exactly was Jesus’ call to sinners? It was to repent and believe the good news.

God will judge  
those outside.  
“Expel the wicked  
person from  
among you.”

1 Corinthians 5:13

The church that ignores its members who are marinating in sin is not acting in love. Proverbs 27:6 warns, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” The church that truly wants to treat its members like friends will confront sin. Avoidance or expulsion from the church is just one dimension of church discipline. Matthew 18:15–17 describes four stages in the process of confronting someone who sins against us. In today’s passage Paul seems to have the final stage of this process in view.

This letter to the Thessalonians concludes with Paul’s prayers for the Lord’s peace, grace, and presence to fill the believers. In a pagan city during a tumultuous time, the church in Thessalonica could still have peace “at all times an in every way” because they knew the “Lord of peace himself” (v. 16).

### Apply the Word

When exercising church discipline, it is as important to proceed with the right attitude as it is to take the appropriate steps. The church should not be vindictive. We are not to “regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer” (v. 15). We confront because we care. Our goal is to preserve the family, not thin the herd.

### Pray with Us

As we come to the end of our study this month, let’s thank God for the truths revealed to us in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Let’s pray that, as Christians, we would always remember and cling to the hope we have in Christ.

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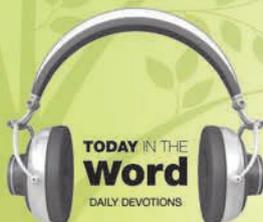
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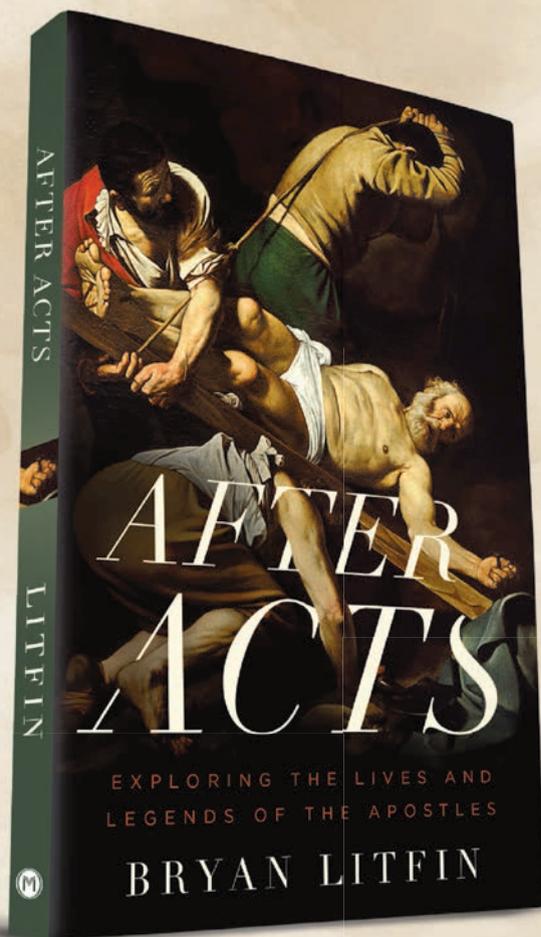


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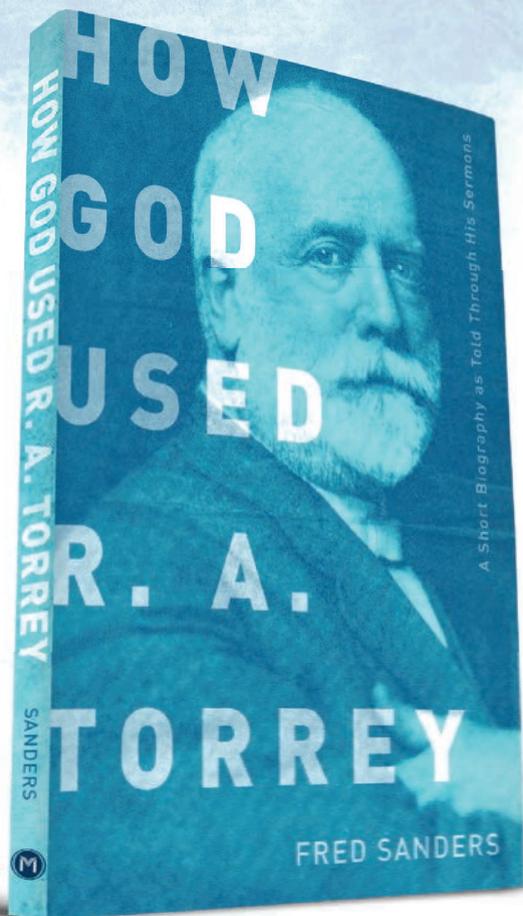
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