

## 1st Thessalonians Chapter 5

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Sometimes when you peel an orange, you find the skin is a lot thicker than you thought, and there is not as much fruit as you expected. But the skin of a pomegranate is thin, and it is always packed with fruit. So when I come across a portion of Scripture so filled with spiritual blessings, promises or instructions, it's as though God has given me a spiritual pomegranate. I thought this when I started reading 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. The chapter is bursting with encouragement for the Christian life.

Paul ended chapter 4 explaining the first part of the promised return of Jesus Christ. This is often referred to as the Rapture when Jesus Christ takes his people out of the world. It is described as an instantaneous event in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 and Philippians 3:20-21.

In Chapter 5:1-11, Paul writes about the Day of the Lord. It is a subject that focuses on events centred on Israel leading up to Christ's millennial kingdom. It was a subject Paul had already taught the Thessalonian Christians about. He explains this in verses 1 & 2,

“But concerning the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (vv.1-2).

“Times” refers to a period of time. “Season” refers to what characterises these periods. Just before ascending to heaven, His disciples asked Him,

““Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [He replied], “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”” (Acts 1:6-8).

It is not the business of Christians to second guess world events which are in God's hands. Instead, we are to concentrate on witnessing to the Saviour until He returns for His people.

Paul then moves on to how we should live as “sons of the light and sons of the day” (v.5). This describes our character. Peter uses similar language,

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

We are not to be asleep to the spiritual realities God has revealed to us but alert to the darkness of the world and be characterised by faith, love, and hope. These three attributes, like the breastplate and helmet worn by a soldier, identify and protect us.

Paul explains that we enter into all the fullness of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ because he “died for us” (v.10). We are not saved by anything we have done but because Christ laid down His life for us. God may reward us, or we may suffer loss because of our unfaithfulness, but we will only be in heaven because Christ “loved me and gave Himself for me.” This one astounding fact should stimulate us to “comfort each other and edify one another” (v.11). And we should recognise and highly esteem those gifted to help us in this process and ensure that we are at peace with one another (v.12-13). Paul highlights the necessity of warning those who act disorderly, comfort the faint-hearted and support the weak. As Christians, we should always seek to act as Christ by repaying evil with good (vv.14-15).

Then in verses 16-22, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, presents seven encouragements in seven short verses.

### **Rejoice always**

The first encouragement is to rejoice. It is expressed in two words, “Rejoice always” (v.16). It is the second shortest verse in the New King James Version of the Bible. “Jesus wept”, in John 11:35, is the shortest verse. There is a vital connection between the two. The suffering love of Christ has brought us into the joy and the security of eternal salvation,

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29).

Spiritual joy wells up in our hearts from knowing that we are loved by God and will never be separated from Him. It is a joy we should never lose. There is not a day when we do not have a reason to express joy,

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10).

### **Pray without ceasing**

The second encouragement is to “Pray without ceasing” (v.17). The joy we have in God leads us to the Throne of Grace. We should live close to this throne. The Queen of Sheba said of the servants of Solomon,

“Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom!” (1 Kings 10:8).

These servants lived close to the throne, and this is how we should live. Paul wasn’t saying our lives are one long prayer meeting but that we should live in a spirit of constant communication with God, knowing there is no circumstance we cannot and should not seek God’s help. Systematic prayer times in our homes and fellowship are vital, and we have the privilege of spontaneous prayer as we pass through each day.

## **Thankfulness**

The third encouragement is to express thankfulness in everything (v.18). Paul writes about the last days in 2 Timothy 3,

“For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” (v.2).

We should never be marked by unthankfulness or unholiness. The joy we possess and the access we have to the Throne of Grace makes us a thankful people. Keith Getty and Stuart Townend have described our personal thankfulness beautifully in their hymn, “My heart is filled with thankfulness.” And it is also God’s will in Jesus Christ that joyfully and prayerfully we, in a fellowship of thankfulness,

“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name” (Psalm 100:4).

## **Do not quench the Spirit**

The fourth encouragement is to rejoice in the expressions of a burning heart, “Do not quench the Spirit” (v.18). I remember hearing a brother describing another Christian as a wet blanket! It was a forthright comment but based on clear evidence. We can quench the Spirit in our own lives by fearing to express what God has laid on our hearts. This is usually because of false humility, a feeling of unworthiness, or not simply trusting the Lord. More commonly, it is throwing a “wet blanket” on the Holy Spirit’s work in the hearts of others by being dismissive or critical. Isaiah 42:1-3 speaks prophetically of the Lord Jesus as the Servant of God. As such, He would not break a “bruised reed” and would not quench a “smoking flax.” We should recognise hearts which the Lord has caused to burn,

“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ in our hearts. This experience is for our blessing, the benefit of the body of Christ and testimony in the world.

Sometimes our responses to the Lord can seem like a “smoking flax”; a candle’s wick about to go out. I grew up in homes with coal fires. On many occasions, I have seen my grandmother kneeling down in the fireplace and blowing on the dying embers of a fire. In moments a flame would appear, and by carefully adding fuel, she created a roaring fire. Our weakness is never a problem for the Lord. He knows how to come close and take our feebleness to build a fire in our heart and give the faith to express it. He did this in the home at Emmaus and sent His Spirit as tongues of fire at Pentecost. How often have the words of Scripture, the verse of a hymn, or a simple, faltering expression of praise set our hearts on fire in worship? Why would we ever seek to quench what the Lord has given?

But that’s what Judas tried to do when Mary anointed the feet of the Lord with “a pound of very costly oil of spikenard” (John 12:3). He tried to cast a large “wet blanket” over Mary’s act of worship. She had responded in sacrificial and silent devotion to the Lord. It was a response to the greatness of His love and power as the Resurrection and the Life. I don’t think Judas’ remarks diverted Mary’s devotion. On the contrary, it was a pivotal moment in her life when she recognised that the Lord would sacrifice His life and she knew that He was worthy of all that she had. She would not allow what the Lord had stirred in her heart to be quenched.

When we see such responses in the hearts of our brothers and sisters in Christ, it is time, in fellowship, to add fuel to the fire. In the Old Testament we find there were morning and evening sacrifices (Exodus 29:39-46). We should, in worship and service, offer the sacrifices of burning hearts,

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Many waters could not quench the love of Christ. May we always encourage the flame of this love and its blessings in each other’s hearts.

### **Do not despise prophecies**

In the fifth encouragement of Paul, we are told not to despise prophecies (v.20). Prophecy declares the mind and will of God about the past, present and future. There was a period of foundational prophetic ministry which ran alongside and supported the apostolic ministry. The Church was,

“Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20).

Now we have the completed Scriptures. Their exposition is for the building up and blessing of the Church of God. Because they are finished, their truths will be referred to and re-visited many times. Of course, we will learn things we have never seen before, but they were there all the time, ready to be discovered. The word of God is ministered to our hearts and minds through personal reading and study of God’s word, sharing it with one another and through the public ministry of God’s word.

[“The word of God is living and powerful” \(Hebrews 4:12\). Through it, we have received life in Christ and the path to enter into every spiritual blessing.](#)

To minister God’s word is a great privilege and responsibility. But it is also a great privilege and responsibility to listen to the word of God. We often focus our attention on the quality of speakers. God’s word must be communicated effectively, in dependence upon the Lord and the Holy Spirit and with humility. But we also need to focus on the quality of our listening. The human ear is not like a hearing aid that collects all sounds. We can choose the messages we receive and those we don’t want to receive. Being in an audience doesn’t mean we are listening. We can choose not to be attentive because our minds are engaged elsewhere, or we see no value in what is being said. My responsibility is to listen to the ministry of God’s word and to test the message by the Scriptures, which we will come to later. But I should not dismiss or despise ministry because I have heard such a message many times before or because I am not keen on the speaker. We should be so thankful God repeats Himself. In grace, He takes into account our slowness to learn and remember. And when we do understand and remember, the same grace keeps in the good of those blessings. There are many times I can look back on the ministry that has convicted, challenged, and changed me. This was not because of the speaker’s eloquence but because the ministry was Christ centred, and I was listening to what was said, not focussing who said it.

[In Numbers 21, the Children of Israel said to Moses about manna, “our soul loathes this worthless bread” \(v.5\). They wanted to return to the diet they had in Egypt. The diet of a slave. They discovered by despising what they were familiar with and what constantly reminded them of the goodness of God, they laid themselves open to the serpents God sent amongst them. They were only delivered by looking to the brazen serpent which Moses lifted up \(John 3:14\). God’s word](#)

keeps us safe, reminds us of His constant goodness, brings us into His blessing, and lifts up our hearts to Christ. We should be so thankful we still live in a society where we have the word of God in our own language, where it can be taught, and we can freely listen when so many of our brethren do not have these precious privileges. Never let us despise the teaching of the word of God but ask the Lord to give us listening ears, teachable hearts, understanding minds and a fruitful and holy walk.

### **Test all things**

Paul's sixth encouragement is to "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (v.21). In Acts 17, when persecution arose in Thessalonica, the brethren sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. Wasting no time, they went into the synagogue of the Jews and shared the Gospel. The Jews in Berea are described as "more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (v.11). The Bereans are a helpful example of testing the truth of what was preached by referencing the Scriptures. By searching the word of God to determine the truth of what was said, they discovered the teaching of the apostles was genuine, and there was a great spiritual blessing. We should follow their example, especially when there are many things taught today which are not soundly based on the word of God.

In Luke 24 the Lord, caused the two disciples' hearts to burn as He opened the Scriptures (v.32). Later, at Jerusalem, the Lord opened the minds of His disciples "to understand the Scriptures" (v.45). The Scriptures are applied to our hearts and minds, and we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to respond with spiritual devotion and spiritual intelligence. This is different to natural emotional responses and academic learning. The living word of God reaches into our souls and spirits. It inspires devotion, sacrifice and worship, and it produces spiritual knowledge and wisdom. The word of God gives us the means to judge what is taught under the banner of Christendom. The Spirit of Truth helps us to discern what is true and good and hold fast to it. He also helps us identify what does not correspond to God's word and the misuse of Scripture. At the beginning of Christ's ministry, Satan quotes out of context verses of the Bible to challenge the Person of Christ (Matthew 4:1-11). The Lord responded by "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

It is vital that those who minister God's word are spiritually disciplined and do not make assumptions and go beyond what God says. We also have to recognise that there are some things God does not tell us, and it is not for us to fill in the gaps. God gives us beautiful insights into His word, and we have our eyes opened to see "wondrous things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18). But we also have to be careful not to overcomplicate and embellish Scripture. Water is used as an illustration of the word of God (Ephesians 5:26). The river of the water of life in Revelation 22:1 is "clear as crystal." The Lord Jesus describes the most profound spiritual truths in concise and straightforward language. We should follow His example.

It is a joy to hear the truth of God ministered, to embrace it, hold on to it, cherish it, share it, and live by it. The word of God sanctifies us, protects, inflames our hearts, teaches our minds, clarifies our understanding, and causes us to,

"Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him  
be the glory both now and forever. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).

### **Abstaining from every form of evil**

Paul's final encouragement is to "Abstain from every form of evil" (v.22). Rejoicing in our salvation and our many spiritual blessings, bringing everything to God in prayer and having thankful hearts all keeps us close to the Lord. We live in the assurance of His goodness and grace. Not quenching the Spirit ensures the Spirit's leading and guidance are recognised and not hindered. Not

despising the ministry of God's word ensures that we are listening and responding to its direction. Testing all things ensures what we are taught is consistent with the word of God, and we resolutely hold fast to what is good. The application of God's word in the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to discern every kind or species of evil. This includes what is obviously wrong. It also identifies what can gradually and subtly lead us away from the truth or morally corrupt us. Testing applies to the ministry of God's word and all the practical decisions we make in our lives that have spiritual consequences.

Lot is a vivid example of this danger. He made the most critical decision of his life based purely on the attractiveness of the land surrounding Sodom (Genesis 13:10-13). He did not reflect long before making this life-changing decision. He did not ask Abraham for time to pray about and consider what he should do. And he never asked Abraham's spiritual advice. And he did not take into account the real and present dangers of an evil society. He was snared by what was physically beautiful and drawn into a world he should have fled from. When Abraham rescued him and restored his possessions, he did not have the spiritual strength to walk away from his chosen life and return to being a pilgrim. It is heart-breaking to see once bright Christians engulfed by and conformed to the world with only a superficial interest in the things of God. We all need to be aware of evil in all its forms because we can fall into the trap of spiritually rationalising what will do us lasting harm.

Abstaining is about restraining the tendency we find in ourselves to do what is contrary to God's will. Paul is not describing abstaining in the sense of declining to vote for or against a proposal as we sometimes see in our Parliament. This usually suggests mixed political motives. Instead, he is writing about the spiritual war we are all in (Ephesians 6:10-21). Christianity is about decisiveness. Hesitation and lack of clarity about what we know is against God's will is very dangerous. We live in a spiritually dangerous world. There is a constant battle for the hearts and minds of people. The objective is to get everyone thinking and acting in the same way but without reference to God or His word. Paul is straightforward in his appeal that we restrain ourselves from being involved with evil in all its forms. This is where Psalm 119:11 is so helpful,

“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You”  
(ESV).

Holding fast to what is good and shining God's word on our daily pathway gives us the courage to abstain from what is obviously evil and the wisdom to recognise and abstain from evil disguised as good.

## **Sanctification**

Paul closes this remarkable chapter by commending them to the God of Peace and His work of sanctification,

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it”  
(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

It is very striking that Paul ends his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians by lifting them before the God of peace. He wrote in the first chapter how they had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven” (v. 9-10). This resulted in their “work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father” (v.3). He wanted them to continue to grow in grace and abound in faith, love, and hope. So, he prays for their sanctification.

There are two aspects to sanctification. First, it describes our separation to God based entirely on the work of Christ,

“We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

We are in Christ and belong to God, and nothing can separate us from Him (John 10:27-30, Romans 8:38-39).

This is often referred to as our “standing” before God. The second aspect of our sanctification is sometimes called “practical sanctification.” It is the process by which holiness is developed in our lives. The spiritual objective of this process is for our “state” to become consistent with our “standing.” We often feel disappointed and distressed that we fail in living in the way God wants us to live. But we should never forget we are in Christ and never give up wanting to become like Him.

Paul writes about our spirit, soul, and body. In simple terms, the spirit has been described as our God-consciousness, the soul as our self-consciousness, and our body as our physical consciousness. Evil can attack us in each of these areas of our lives. The fruit in the garden of Eden taken in disobedience was described as,

“Good for food (our body), that it was pleasant to the eyes (our souls), and a tree desirable to make one wise (our spirit)” (Genesis 3:6).

Satan’s temptation was an attack on our whole being. John warns us of these dangers,

“For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

In these things, we can trace the history of the fall of man.

Paul writes with great confidence, “may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it”. We are protected from the great dangers we face in the world as a system, our fallen nature, and the power of Satan by the Father’s love, the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord prayed in John 17 that the Father would sanctify His disciples “by Your truth,” adding that “Your word is truth” (v. 17). We have the word of God. It was this word the Lord Jesus turned to at the beginning of His ministry when confronted by Satan when He was tested body, soul, and spirit (Luke 4:1-13). The testing does not end until we are with the Lord; “preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”, but the expectation of His coming also aids our sanctification,

“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

### **Paul’s farewell**

The apostle was always conscious of the need of the prayers of his fellow Christians. This is simply expressed by his appeal, “Brethren, pray for us” (v.25) and linked to his expression of affection for his brothers and sisters in Christ, “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss” (v.26). Paul’s letters form part of the canon of Scripture. They are words given by the Holy Spirit of God and intended to be constantly read for our guidance and spiritual blessing. Consequently, Paul charges that his letter is publicly read, “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren” (v.27).

Paul's final words are,

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen” (1 Thessalonians 5:28).

We are saved by grace and kept by grace. This stream of grace never fails, we just need to live in the light and good of it.

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