

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS:

Today we get practical. Over the past few weeks, we've been saying: Prepare. Keep watch! Jesus is coming. We prepare for his coming as a baby in Bethlehem, but we also prepare for his second coming. How do we prepare for Jesus' coming? Repent! Confess sin to God, and where possible to others. Then listen to God: he forgives you for the sake of his one and only Son who lived for you and died for you and rose again. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. We talked about how Jesus is the ark that saves us from God's justice. When you are in the ark, that is when you have faith in Christ Jesus, you are safe and secure.

Today, though, I especially want to talk to you about what this readiness, watchfulness and preparedness looks like in your daily life. You see, when you trust in the Lord Jesus, you belong to him. You love him. You want to please him in everything you think, say and do. Therefore, your preparedness will be evident in every walk of life. But in what way? Again: what does this look like in practice? Could we have some more details? And God says, "sure." The answer to that question is found in the Scripture before us today: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24.

The message title is simply this: Final instructions. I know, not very creative... it's the section heading you'll find in your NIV pew Bibles there. But I couldn't think of anything more descriptive or more accurate. Paul has said it all. In the previous section he's told them about the coming of the Lord, Judgment Day. So he's prepared them for Jesus' coming, just as we have been prepared for Jesus' coming. So now he's ready to wrap up this letter, and he does so with some final instructions which would help the Thessalonians remain prepared. And this part of Scripture will do the same for us.

RE: Spiritual leaders.

12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge [appreciate] those who work hard among you, who care (rule over) for you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard [esteem very highly] in love because of their work.

- 1) They are laborers (toilers.) Exert themselves in the interest of fellow believers. Includes all who work for the church, volunteer or full time. They are over you (superintendents or managers) in the Lord.

- 2) And what does their work entail? **They admonish.** Put in mind to obey God's ordinances. Those who are veering from God, they bring them back. Those who love God, his word, his works and his will, and share it with others. Sometimes that is very hard work!
- 3) Hold them in highest regard in love because of this work (not who they are and how much you like their personality... or not.)
Consequences if we don't? We dismiss what they teach us. We discourage them in life-saving work they are doing. We hinder our preparedness when we don't hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.
- 4) **Live in peace with each other.** A bridge to the next section. It refers to the spiritual leaders. *Stop your carping. Don't criticize your leaders,* but follow their godly instruction so that peace may result. But I think it's also talking about relationships in general, and that's what the following verses speak about.

Is your prepared heart which has been made ready through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit EVIDENT in your daily life... when it comes to spiritual leaders? Do you honor them? Do you hold them in the highest regard?

Final instructions... RE: Relationships.

It's all about people! Practice Christian Love

Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle [and disruptive],

- 1) Don't live the life of a loafer. God expects us to work. Or... word could mean those who are disorderly or disruptive. Actually idleness and being a disruptive influence often go hand in hand. A person who doesn't work much has plenty of time to complain about what other are doing. God says to warn them.

encourage the disheartened (losing heart (depressed)),

Persecution and the death of loved ones may have done this. Worry. Depression.

help [supply what is needed to] **the weak,**

Those who have moral and spiritual lapses because their faith isn't strong.

be patient with everyone.

Note these instructions are directed to everyone... not just the spiritual leaders of the congregation. God says to you: if you notice an idle person who is a disruptive influence, warn them. See the disheartened? Encourage them! See someone weak and giving in to sin? Help them, don't abandon them! *Be patient* with everyone. Work with each other. Seek to understand, to love, to help... not to judge, to dismiss, to gossip, to reject.

15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. It's so easy to pay back when someone injures you! Love each other.

So... you want to be prepared for Jesus' coming. How are your relationships with your fellow believers? Is there someone you should be talking to? Some issue that should be resolved? Do you know anyone depressed? Do you know anyone weak? Let's help each other be prepared!

Final instruction: RE: Your personal attitude and outlook.

16 Rejoice always, pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Have the right attitude. How you view things is more important than what happens to you. Event > Thought > Feeling > Behavior. No matter what event happens in your life your identity and purpose are untouched and unchanged. You often can't control the event, but the thought and feeling which form the behavior are controlled either by the Old Adam or the New Man.

16 Rejoice always, It's more than positive thinking... you are celebrating a positive *reality*. You are a child of God. Your sins are forgiven. Heaven is your home. This gives joy that rises above whatever circumstance you may face. Not that you won't experience earthly sorrow. You will. But you can experience heavenly joy in the midst of earthly sorrow!

17 pray continually, Take hold on God. Grab a hold of him always. Don't let go. In all circumstances! Pray continually.

18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

This includes during affliction, anguish, persecution, famine, peril, sword. Give thanks to God. How can you give thanks for the bad? God promises all will work out for good. Job said, "The Lord gives and the Lord has taken away... may the name of the Lord be praised." God is good and in control and if you trust that he will work all out for you eternal good, you truly can give thanks in all circumstances.

So, pay attention to your attitude. Your thinking. Your feeling. With the help of the Holy Spirit living in you, your thoughts and feelings can change, and your behavior, then, will too! *Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

Final instructions RE: The Spirit's testimony.

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil.

Prophecies: A prophet was one who would both fore tell and tell forth. He was a person given a direct revelation from God. Frequently it dealt with the future, so he was foretelling something which God revealed. But sometimes the prophecy was a message from God for right now. In that case he was telling forth. He was speaking forth what God gave. Fore teller versus forth teller.

So in these days before the New Testament Scriptures were finished being recorded, and while the church was small and under heavy fire from every side, God gave special gifts, special endowments... the greatest of which was prophesying. Don't put down the Word of God spoken by the prophets! These are the means through which faith is created and strengthened. Today, the word of the prophets is recorded in Scripture... everything needed for our salvation. We need no more direct utterances from God.

Thessalonians were apparently despising prophesying. Undoubtedly Satan was sending in some false prophets. They were offensive and destructive. So some concluded, "Let's ignore all prophesying!"

But that's not the answer. Instead, test them all. Hold on to the good, reject every kind of evil. We must ask: Is this from God, or is it not? [ILLUSTRATION: The member in Iskitim who went to all churches and just smiled and nodded whatever was preached and taught... even when it conflicted with something she knew was true.]

So, on the one hand, (1) don't throw out all teaching and preaching which claims to be from God as some do. They say, "There is no objective truth. No matter what is being said, it is the preacher's opinion." Not true! There is truth. (2) But we must not go to the other extreme either. "Whatever is said by a man who has the title pastor or priest must be from God!" No, we must test it all. The litmus test is Scripture itself. Does the word proclaimed mesh perfectly with all that God revealed in Scriptures, or not?

Final instructions: RE: God's Work for YOU.

These last verse focus on God's work for you. This is the heart, core and center of true Christianity, so it makes sense that Paul would end with this... and we will too. The strength to do the things we have discussed above cannot come from us, but only from God. Finally, this is his work in us, not something we can produce independently from him.

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Lest we start to focus on self and our own ability and work. Lest we start to wonder, "Am I doing enough? Am I following these final instructions well enough?" Paul ends with the reminder, **The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.** Your status of blameless is something imparted by God. He does it through the perfect life and innocent death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So how can I thank him, serve him and obey him... and stay close to him until the end? Glad you asked! Spiritual leaders. Relationships. Personal attitude. And Spirit's testimony. And always keep front and center that it's God's work *for you* that has made you a child of God and fit for heaven. Prepare! Prepare the way for the Lord. Not just sitting here in church, but prepare in your daily living as well. Heed these final instructions from our God who loves you and wants nothing more than for you to spend eternity with him in heaven. Amen.