

1. Judgment and salvation

- a. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians has much to say on the issue of God's final judgment and the "Day of the Lord." It is against this backdrop that we come to our passage today.
- b. What we see in our passage today is a list of commands of do's and don'ts for the church. Taken on its own it would be easy to see this as a passage which suggests we have to work our way towards God.
 - i. I watched the movie "Cowboys and Aliens" the other day, and there is a scene where the town doctor/innkeeper asks the town pastor about why he doesn't sense God around him.
 - ii. The pastor said, "First you have to earn God's presence. Then you have to notice it. Then you have to act upon it."
 - iii. While I don't recommend pop-culture for theology, it seems that so many people do get many if not most of their beliefs from pop culture and entertainment.
- c. Does the bible teach that we have to earn God's presence? Does it teach that we have to work towards God or earn his love? Does this passage from Thessalonians teach any of this?
- d. Absolutely not. Verses 9 and 10 of chapter 5 (the chapter we are in) says, "For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him."
- e. This is the culmination of the previous part of the chapter where Paul is encouraging the Christians in Thessalonica to not be afraid of the Day of the Lord because God himself has destined them for salvation, and not by their own works, but by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. The Christian life

- a. What happens is that people often don't know what the whole of scripture teaches- or even what a whole book of the bible teaches. They know that there are lists of do's and don'ts. They know they have been told they need to be good or they will go to hell. But they have no idea what Christianity actually believes and teaches.
- b. For many, conversion is the end of the line. They finally realize that they can't do it on their own and they submit to Jesus and are saved. End of story. Or they do believe that they can save themselves through good works, and they spend their entire lives trying to earn God's love, so that in their last breath, they can pass knowing that they had done the best they could do- and hopefully endeared themselves to God.
- c. For Paul- and the rest of the New Testament- conversion is the beginning. When you finally get to that point where you realize that Christ died on the cross for your sins, and that you can have forgiveness through him- that constitutes the beginning of the journey.

- d. The do's and don'ts of the NT aren't about earning God's love, but about living as those who already know his love and love him.
 - i. Think of it this way: I am not a pastor because I serve communion on Sundays at church. I serve communion on Sundays at church because I am a pastor.
 - ii. Likewise, we aren't good so that God will love us. God loves us, therefore we love him in return and want to do good.
 - e. So when Paul is running down this list of do's and don'ts, he is doing so in light of verses 9 and 10 that point to Christ, and then he is answering an implied question: in light of your salvation, while you wait for the Day of the Lord, how ought you to live?
 - f. There is a term for this: discipleship. Conversion is the first step. Conversion is also known as rebirth or being born again. This implies that it is the beginning of a new life, a new journey.
3. The work of sanctification
- a. So then Paul goes on to talk about discipleship and another word, sanctification. Discipleship is the process of learning and growing and becoming a disciple of Christ. Sanctification is the process of being made new in Christ- having the sin in our lives replaced with holiness.
 - b. Paul gives a list in response to his implied question of how should you live in light of Christ's death and resurrection?
 - c. He says for the Christians to respect their pastors- those who labor among them. He says that they should respect the pastors and let them have charge over them. This isn't about power, but about understanding that the pastor is charged with the task of growing the body in discipleship and teaching them about the Lord.
 - d. Of particular importance is that he says to let the pastors have charge to admonish. This is important because it is intended to keep people from ignoring hard teachings, or teachings they don't like.
 - e. Likewise, he encourages the Christians to build up the weaker of the body around them. Help them to grow in the Lord. And admonish the idlers and those who seem particularly lax in the faith. Admonish doesn't mean to belittle or make feel bad, but simply to show them their error and then to try to show them the better way.
 - f. He tells them to repay evil with good and to do good to everyone. It isn't befitting for a child of the Lord to seek revenge or to give evil for evil, when we were given grace and mercy in the midst of our own evil actions against God.
 - g. He tells them to be thankful and aware of all the good God has done for them, and to likewise be ever in prayer. He doesn't necessarily mean that you should never stop praying. But he is showing the importance of prayer to the Christian life. Don't make it an afterthought to your life, but make it a priority- something you do regularly.
 - h. Do not quench the Spirit. The Spirit is that which gives life to the believer. Do not be given to sin which the Spirit calls us from, thus silencing it in our lives. But be given over to the Spirit and let him do his work within you.
 - i. Do not despise the word of prophets. This could mean prophets in their midst, or it could mean the prophets as the voice of the scriptures. In either case, prophets

shared direct revelation from God. As such, a prophet would be required to have 100% accuracy. Given that Paul follows this statement about prophets with the phrase “but test everything” it seems at least possible that he was speaking of actual prophets in their midst. But they must test everything, because if someone claims to be a prophet but gets any prophecy wrong, then they are not in fact a prophet.

- i. The point here is that the people are to be respectful and thoughtful with regards to the word of God- whether from the scriptures or a more direct revelation.
- j. Finally, hold fast to what is good and abstain from every evil. This is a simple answer to the bigger question of how the Christian should live. Do good, do not do evil.
- k. Paul closes with the following: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.
- l. So again, after giving the list of do’s and don’ts- after running down how a forgiven Christian should live, Paul appeals back to the power of God as being that which actually enables the Christian to do so.
- m. It is God who sanctifies, just as it is God who justifies. God took it upon himself to send his Son to die as atonement for our sins. God took it upon himself to treat Jesus’ death as a suitable punishment for our sins. God even takes it upon himself to sanctify us- to remove the sin from our lives and allow us to live holier lives in Christ.
- n. None of this sounds like the pop-culture theology of the Old West pastor in “Cowboys and Aliens.”
 - i. “First you have to earn God’s presence. Then you have to notice it. Then you have to act upon it.”
 - ii. Instead, God proves to do just the opposite. First, he fixes our sins in Christ. Then he calls us back to him in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, after forgiving us and returning us to his own bosom, he sanctifies us and makes us into the holy people he created us to be.
- o. Paul speaks of this grace and mercy of our great God this way: The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.
 - i. Because of all that he has already done, we know we can trust that he will continue to be with us, so that we may be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.