

**EXEGETICAL
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Series B

Festival Season Sundays

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WORKS USED OR CITED IN THE COMPOSITION OF THESE NOTES:

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Advent III: I Thess. 5:16-24: Living in Readiness for the Lord's Coming.

1. Beginning at 4:13 Paul speaks about the coming of the Lord. Paul tells the Thessalonians to comfort each other with this doctrine. Beginning at 5:1 Paul speaks about the day of the Lord. This section is similar to last Sunday's text, II Pet. 3:8-14. Twice Paul likens the day of the Lord to the coming of a thief, vss. 2 and 4. In vss. 1-11 Paul admonishes his hearers to sober living. Just as he told his hearers to comfort each other with reference to the coming of Christ (4:18), so he advises them to comfort each other with reference to the day of the Lord (5:11). In vss. 12-15 Paul gives some additional directives concerning Christian living. This brings us to our text.
2. Note that the Nestle-Aland text prints vss. 16-22 as poetry. Cf. Lk. 1:68-79. That is done here because some modern scholars are of the opinion that these vss. have a liturgical significance. For example, in his commentary on I Thessalonians F. F. Bruce states on page 122: "Possibly instruction was given in this form to serve as an easily memorized catechesis. On the two series of cola in vss. 16-22 a further suggestion is made by Martin (Worship, 135, 136), who acknowledges his indebtedness to some thoughts expressed by J. M. Robinson. He notes that in each colon the verb stands last, and that there is a preponderance of words beginning with "p" (pi). 'When the passage is set down in lines', he observes, 'it reads as though it contained the 'headings' of a Church service'--emphasis being laid on the introductory note of 'glad adoration', with prayer and thanksgiving, on the liberty of the Spirit and on the avoidance of anything unseemly." But this is only an hypothesis. In his commentaries on I Thessalonians (both Tyndale N.T. Commentaries and NIC) Leon Morris makes no mention of such a theory. None of our well-known modern Bible versions read these lines as poetry.
3. Vs. 16: In vss. 16-18 we have present tense imperatives. In all three cases either an adverb or a phrase precedes the imperative. The commentators point out that vss. 16-18 comprise a unit. The gar clause at the end of vs. 18 covers three, not just one, verse. pantote means "at all times." chairō means "to be joyful." This vs. immediately reminds us of Phil. 3:1: "Rejoice in the Lord!" Surely the phrase en kuriō is understood here at I Thess. 5:16 as it is plainly stated at Phil. 3:1. It is not easy to give this phrase its grammatical significance. Likely it is causal: "because of the Lord." Perhaps it also denotes manner: "by trusting in the Lord." Faith in Christ underlies the imperatives in vss. 16-18. At Mt. 5:11,12 where Jesus speaks about the innocent suffering of a persecuted Christian He says: "Rejoice and exult because your reward is great in heaven." The joy of a Christian is truly paradoxical. There is so much sorrow, frustration and adversity in life. And then there's also the guilt of a Christian who is told to rejoice. This vs. implies that the Christian should listen to the Lord who says: "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." The Christian needs the promises of the Gospel just as a baby bird constantly needs to be fed. On this vs. Morris states: "He (Paul) had learned that affliction and deep joy may go together (2 Cor. 6:10), and could rejoice in tribulations (Rom. 5:3; cf. Acts 16:25). So he can counsel perpetual rejoicing even to a church which was suffering so greatly. . . . They had learned the truth of His words 'your joy no man taketh from you' (Jn. 16:22). . . . Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)." Rienecker-Rogers calls our attention to the fact that the present tense (of this imperative) calls for a continual attitude of rejoicing. Faith in Christ causes a Christian

to think more of the Lord than of difficulties; more of spiritual riches in Christ than of earthly poverty; and, more of the glorious future in heaven than of the uncertain present and the unhappy past. Lenski says here: "The joy of the Christians is the product of the whole Gospel and of the salvation that is theirs in Christ. Earthly joys fade after a brief moment; our joy of salvation never fades. Yet we need to be told, ever to rejoice; for we let so many little adversities beset and even darken our joyfulness." Whenever Jesus told people not to be afraid He always gave them the reason. Whenever the pastor tells people to rejoice at all times he should give them the reason, nothing but Gospel.

4. Vs. 17: On the adverb adialeiptōs Rienecker-Rogers comments: "The word was used of that which was continually and repeatedly done; e.g., the uninterrupted necessary payment of hard taxes; the continual service or ministry of an official; a continual uninterrupted cough." In a footnote Morris states: "The word Paul uses here is proeuchesthe, which expresses devotion, the God-ward look, rather than deomai which would fasten attention rather on one's need." And Lenski on the same verb: "This verb is used only in the full sacred sense of turning to God, in worshipful forms." Both Jesus and Paul were men of prayer. Both told us to pray at all times. Paul says that here in our text and at Eph. 6:18. Jesus said it too. For example, see Lk. 18:1 where Jesus speaks of the necessity of praying always and not getting weary of it. And Jesus and Paul faithfully followed their own injunction of constant prayer. Were they actually engaged in verbal prayer at all times? No. On this point Morris comments: "It is not possible for us to spend all our time with the words of prayer on our lips, but it is possible for us to be all our days in the spirit of prayer, realizing our dependence on God for all that we have and are. . . . Where there is such an inward state it will find outward expression in verbal prayer." As a flower is always facing the sun, so the Christian, by faith, is turning toward God. Christians are conscious of their dependence on God. Their rejoicing and prayer life go together. Kretzmann says: "The apostle does not merely urge regularity in the practise of prayer, but he wants our hearts always to be disposed toward prayer, always in the mood to make all our wants known to Him who never fails His children." A constant, persevering attitude of prayer is undergirded by a compelling conviction that God has commanded us to prayer and has promised to hear us. Cf. the whole parable at Lk. 18:1-8.
5. Vs. 18: en panti is not the same as pantote. The two are distinguished at II Cor. 9:8. RSV, TEV, and NIV render this phrase: "in all circumstances." That is more effective here than to say "at all times." No circumstance in life is an excuse for not being thankful. We think here of the verse which occurs about a dozen times in the Old Testament: "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." God is good in the sense that He is merciful. That mercy never ceases. Therefore, we should never cease to give thanks. Even at funerals. Even in deep adversity. Midst his great adversities Job said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21. Thanksgiving is closely associated with prayer. Phil. 4:6. Morris comments: "Like the preceding two, this one (thanksgiving) springs from the great central truth of the gospel." Lenski makes a worthwhile comment: "The explanation of this pan is found in the panta of Rom. 8:28, all of which cooperate for good to God's children, and thus call forth our thanks to God. . . . If everything actually conspires to do us good, how can we do otherwise than always rejoice?" And now we proceed to the second clause in vs. 18. We have explanatory gar which means "you see." Most commentators

agree that the antecedent of touto is the three imperatives which precede, not just the last one. The fact that this pronoun is singular shows that the three injunctions are a unit. They stand and fall together. All three proceed from faith in Christ. The Christian lives his life by faith in Jesus. Gal. 2:20. Lenski says in all simplicity: "God wants us to rejoice always, to pray ceaselessly, to give thanks in everything." The phrase eis humas is not difficult. Lenski says: "chelēma is the thing God wants as regards us (eis)."
 We quote several versions: TEV: "This is what God wants of you." NIV: "This is God's will for you." JB: "This is what God expects you to do." But the phrase en Christō Jēsou is not so easy. We note that this phrase is typically Pauline. TEV understands it to mean the faith relationship: "This is what God wants of you, in your life in Christ Jesus." JB evidently understands it to mean the strength which Jesus gives: "This is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus." It seems that AAT understands it to mean that the will of God is made known in Christ Jesus: "Whatever happens, thank God, because that is what God in Christ Jesus wants you to do." By the way, AAT limits touto to the third injunction. We cannot improve on what Morris observes: "Nor only is it in Christ that the will of God is revealed. It is in Him that there is given power to men to enable them to live according to that will." By the way, he adds: "The use of the compound name 'Christ Jesus' reminds us of both the deity and the humanity of our Lord."

6. Thus far, in vss. 16-18, we have instances of what we call the third use of the Law. According to this use, God guides and leads us as to His will toward us. But, if the preacher preaches these vss. correctly, the reaction on the part of his hearers will surely be: "Lord, I rejoice, pray and give thanks so half-heartedly. There is so much which I have not done. I have fallen far short of what you will for me." Paul surely realized this. And that is why he added the vss. which follow, especially vs. 23. The preacher must be very sensitive toward the confession of sins by his hearers. The Law makes no one better. The Law does not motivate. The Law does not make alive. Only the Gospel does these things.
7. Vs. 19: All versions except NEB render to pneuma "the (Holy) Spirit." NEB translates "Do not stifle inspiration." From this passage and Eph. 4:30 we learn that the Holy Spirit can be resisted, as Stephen plainly states at Acts 7:51. Here only in the NT the verb "to quench" is used metaphorically. Bruce says: "The verb 'quench' is related to the figure of fire used in various places (e.g. Mt. 3:11 par. Lk. 3:16; Lk. 12:49; Acts 2:3; Rom. 12:11) to denote the Holy Spirit or his activity." Does mē with the present imperative here mean that they should cease quenching or does it mean that they should not make a habit of it? Morris prefers the former and Bruce the latter. The translations are of no help here. Another question: Is this vs. speaking about ecstatic gifts (e.g. speaking in tongues etc.) or is it speaking about the daily ethical work of the Spirit in men's heart? Bruce prefers the former. Morris the latter. Likewise Lenski. We prefer the view of Morris and Lenski. In the NIC Commentary Morris writes: "It (the ecstatic view) seems to be reading a lot into the words of this verse. There is no other evidence that can be cited. In the view of the very general character of the expression it may be well to understand the term more generally. . . . Loafing, immorality, and other sins about which Paul has had occasion to warn his friends will quench the Spirit in a man's life, and result in the loss of spiritual power and joy." And Lenski: "The writers of this epistle are here not referring to the special miraculous charismata, such as speaking with tongues, inspired prophetic utterances, healings, and the like. They are here writing about the

ordinary and regular work of the Spirit, and not about his extraordinary, miraculous manifestation. All that v. 12-18 contains, and all that follows in v. 20-22, deals with nothing exceptional. . . . Such quenching occurs when the fervor that the Spirit kindles in us is greatly lessened, or put out altogether, by fleshly, worldly objections. Many a noble, generous, godly impulse thus dies without producing fruit in action, or brings only a fraction of what it might produce."

8. Vs. 20: Again we have a prohibition. The same question, with reference to the type of action of the verb, applies here as in vs. 19. It is not easy to make a decision on this point. exoutheneō means "to despise, treat with contempt." On the word prophēteia we have a question which is related to the meaning of vs. 19. Does it mean a special ecstatic gift or does it mean simply the Word of God? Beck's AAT is worth reading here and at I Cor. 14. He consistently translates this noun "the Word of God." For our text he has: "Don't despise God's Word when anyone speaks it." We agree with this and also his understanding of this noun in I Cor. 14. Lenski prefers this interpretation here. Morris makes a general statement which is of help here: "The essence of prophecy as the early church understood it appears to have been that the Spirit of the Lord spoke to and through men." And with reference to the Thessalonian situation he says: "If we are to conjecture it seems more in accordance with what we know of conditions in this church to associate the despising of prophecy with second-advent speculations." Some people (and there are Christians among them) do not like to hear about the day of the Lord, the last day. Perhaps Paul is referring to the members of the congregation speaking the Word of God to each other. Christians sometimes despise the Word of God spoken by their peers. But though we do not know the exact situation of this vs., we do know that it says: "Do not despise God's Word." That is a mouthful.
9. Vs. 21: de is very likely "but." This assumes at least a partial reference back to vs. 20. If that is so then the meaning is: "but don't be gullible about everything which is said. You yourselves must test it." dokimazō means either to approve or reject after testing. Note that the Nestle-Aland margin refers us to I Cor. 14:29. That assumes that ecstatic prophecy is meant. We do not think so. We agree with Rienecker-Rogers: "Here it (panta) is unlimited and refers to 'all things whatsoever'." Some think that vs. 21a points forward to 21b and vs. 22. Even Bruce, who prefers the ecstatic interpretation here says: "It is possible, however, that this clause goes more closely with the following one than with the preceding one." Thus Lenski: "'Everything' that might affect their religious life. . . . These two commands (21b and 22) complete the order to test everything." And Morris: "All things must be tested. And not simply tested, but accepted whole-heartedly or rejected decisively as a result of the test." JB renders 21a: "Think before you do anything." That's a paraphrase, but a very interesting one. How often don't we act before thinking, much less testing! How sinful we are! At this point one should read I Jn. 4:1, a good parallel passage. We need to teach our people in such a way that they themselves can test the spirits. There are so many false prophets abroad. And now we come to the two imperatives in 21b and 22. If one reads the Greek aloud one hears the verbal correspondence in the imperatives. to kalon denotes that which is inherently or intrinsically good as opposed to to agathon which means that which is beneficial. katechete means "keep on clinging to." The NEB renders 20-22 thus: "Do not despise prophetic utterances, but bring them all to the test and then keep what is good in them and avoid the bad of whatever kind." In comparison, here is JB: "(Never) treat the gift of prophecy with contempt;

think before you do anything--hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil." NEB limits panta to prophetic utterances. JB makes it more general. We prefer the latter. panta includes the Word of God but is not limited to it. It is both ethical and doctrinal.

10. Vs. 22: apechesthe is a present tense middle imperative: "keep yourselves from." The prepositional phrase can mean either: "from every appearance of evil" (KJV) or "from every kind of evil" (TEV, NIV, AAT). RSV, NKJV, JB and NASB attempt to strike a middle course: "every form of evil." ponēros means "that which is actively evil." Meditate on this verse. It is very strong. How often we disregard it! How easy to yield to the subtle kinds and appearances of that which is evil! How sinful we are!
11. Please read 5:1-22 at this point. How much and how many sins we have to confess! And though God is gracious and merciful in Christ Jesus, we still sin much daily. And therefore the Apostle, who was aware of our sinfulness, adds a prayer (vs. 23) which turns into a promise (vs. 24).
12. Vs. 23: Morris renders de as "but" and remarks "It is only in God that the Thessalonians will be able to do what they have been asked." That might be so but no one else, so far as we know (including the translations), takes de that way. NKJV and NASB translate "now may the God of peace etc." autos is the emphatic form of this word: "God Himself." This stresses the fact that He alone can accomplish this. tēs eirēnēs is the adjectival genitive. What kind of God is He? The God of peace. He is the God Who is known by Christians primarily for the Gospel which gives peace of conscience. Before we proceed, note the similarity between this passage and 3:11-13. There we also have the words "blameless" and en tē parousia, as well as "holiness". Furthermore there we also find autos ho theos. And on the word hagiasai cf. 4:3 where we have hagiasmos. God equally wills my redemption and my sanctification, holiness of living. We have two aorist optatives in this verse. Both are called either complexive or constative, which mean the same thing. This use of the aorist stresses the action as a whole. hagiazō means "to set aside for a specific purpose." The purpose is holiness of living as is plain from the remainder of the verse. holoteleis, here a predicate adjective, means "in your entirety." Man's sinful nature is constantly attempting to reserve a little corner of the heart for the sinful flesh. That won't do. Vs. 23 might be considered an example of Hebrew poetry. The second part of the vs. repeats, strengthens and amplifies the first part of the vs. If that is so, kai is exegetical, meaning "namely." Note the chiasmic arrangement of individual elements in the two clauses. The tripartite description of man here cannot be used in the interest of so-called trichotomy, as opposed to dichotomy. Morris writes: "Paul is not at this point giving a description of the nature of the human constitution. . . . He uses this graphic form by way of insisting that the whole man, and not some part only, is involved." Lenski explains: "Where, as here, spirit and soul are distinguished, the spirit designates our immaterial part as related to God, as capable of receiving the operations of the Spirit of God and of his Word; while soul (psychē) designates this same immaterial part in its function of animating the body also as receiving impressions from the body it animates." Bruce: "The distinction between the bodily and spiritual aspects of human nature is easily made, but to make a comparable distinction between 'spirit' and 'soul' is forced. Few could care to distinguish sharply among the four elements 'heart' 'soul' 'mind' and 'strength' of Mk. 12:30 (amplifying the threefold heart, soul and might of Deut. 6:5)." On the word anemptōs cf. Lk. 1:6 and Job 1:8. It does not mean "sinless." The words are a description of the life

of a Christian who is living in no conscious sin. When Satan accuses a Christian of sin, the Gospel must be applied immediately. Cf. Rom. 8:33-34. Commentators and translators struggle with the meaning of the en phrase in this verse. For example, KJV reads: "unto the coming of our Lord." This is reflected in JB: "for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Others consider it temporal. For example AAT: "when our Lord Jesus Christ comes." Morris comments: "It is clear from earlier passages that the thought of the Parousia loomed large in the thinking both of the apostles and their converts. They were looking for the coming of the Lord. . . . Paul is thinking of a sanctification which continues at the Parousia." Lenski says: "Our being preserved now is 'in connection with' Christ's Parousia. If there were no Parousia, then this preservation would be pointless." Kretzmann: "This goal may not be reached in this life, but at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ all the believers, clothed in the righteousness and holiness of their Redeemer, will be acceptable in the sight of God." In the Tyndale Commentary (as opposed to NIC) Morris comments: "The prayer is not that they may be kept until the coming, but that, at the coming, they may be preserved." But Bruce: "The writers' prayer is that their converts may be preserved entirely without fault until the Parousia and be so found at the Parousia, when they will be perfected in holiness." Lest these remarks leave the reader in confusion we suggest that he read the parallel passage at Phil. 1:6. When my sins bother me I should remember Ps. 23:4-6. Before we leave this vs., a few quotes: Bruce: "autos ho theos, as at the beginning of the first wish-prayer (3:11). 'The God of peace,' as in Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9 (also Heb. 13:20); 2 Thess. 3:16. The sum total of gospel blessings can be expressed by eirēnē (cf. 1:1), the designation ho theos tēs eirēnēs pointing to God as the source of them all." Lenski: "Here sanctification refers to the whole work of God, which follows the kindling of faith in our hearts." Bruce again: "The importance of sanctification (hagiasmos) in the practical area of sexual life has been emphasized in 4:3, 4, 7, where it is implied that sanctification (in all areas of life) is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit (4:8)."

13. Vs. 24: We quote two thought-provoking translations: "He who calls you will do it, because he is faithful." TEV. "You can depend on Him who calls you--He will do it." AAT. Kretzmann remarks: "For the comfort of the Christians, who feel their own insufficiency all too well, the apostle adds: Faithful is He that calls you, who will also do this." Note the importance of kai, meaning "also." In the Nestle-Aland margin at I Cor. 10:13 note the many passages where we have pistos ho theos. The adjective comes emphatically first. And note that ho kalōn is present tense. The Lord calls me constantly. He uses the Gospel to call me, to justify me, to sanctify me, to get me ready for the Lord's coming.