

Personal Study through the Bible-14 (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Before moving into the next section where Paul introduces the rapture, let's review the virtues that Paul emphasizes in the section you have already read. While the rapture is extremely important, so are the spiritual virtues that Paul repeatedly mentions. I guess what I am getting at here is the phenomenon of some believers who display very little possession of or interest in the virtues or Bible doctrine or the mechanics of the spiritual life, yet they are always chatting about the rapture (usually Baptists). To be sure, the rapture does bring great comfort (1 Thess. 4:18) and every believer should be able to defend it as well as enjoy its comforting truths. However, it is always dangerous to focus on just one doctrine that tends to be more sensational.

Note the spiritual and theological virtues that you can glean from the section you have already read in your English Bible:

1. The work of ___ (1:3).
2. The labor of ___ (1:3).
3. The steadfastness of ___ (1:3).
4. Sure knowledge of God's ___ (1:4).
5. Faith expressed as ___ conviction (1:5).
6. Possession of the virtues of Paul and Jesus Christ which included not only faith, hope, and love, but ___ in much tribulation (1:6).
7. Spread of the Word of the ___ throughout Macedonia (1:8).
8. The turning from idols to ___ a living and true God (1:9).
9. Occupation with Christ as per "to ___ for His Son" (1:10).
10. Courage of Paul as expressed by "___ in our God" to preach the Gospel amid opposition (2:2)
11. Honesty as manifested by not coming by "way of ___" (2:3).
12. God-centered life manifested by not "pleasing ___" (2:4).
13. Spiritual love manifested by Paul's affection to impart not only the gospel but his own life, because they had become so "___" to him.
14. Timothy came to strengthen their ___ (3:2).
15. Paul received the good news of their ___ (3:6)
16. "We were comforted about you through your ___ (3:8)."
17. Constant prayer for the opportunity to complete what is lacking in their ___ (10
18. Prayer for God to increase their ___ for one another for further establishment of holiness.
19. Ethical exhortations related to loving and dedicating themselves to God instead of living in "___ passion" (5)
20. Their practice of ___ toward one another (4:9-10)

21. Ethical exhortations related to virtues of not gossiping, minding one's ___ business, working, and being a good witness (4:11-12). This is part of sanctification to God and away from kosmos diabolicus.

What recurs time after time, either explicitly or in the various actions that are described, are the three *theological* virtues of faith, hope, and love. Faith is the first one because this is where we begin our spiritual journey. When we first placed faith in Christ, we were justified and regenerated and gain a totally new way of thinking as we first came in contact with God and Prime Reality. Faith is always first. Faith is believing in what is obvious. It is not wishful thinking and it does not require mathematical certainty any more than the 99.999% of the things that you know that are true, but you cannot prove them with mathematical certainty. Yes, most of what you know, you cannot prove. If you made a list of all of the things that you know and then attempt to check off all of those items you could prove, you would likely not be able to make one check mark. I am serious. You cannot even prove that you are not dreaming right now! You cannot prove that your mind is not in a vat. You cannot even prove that you know the way to work and back home. You cannot prove that I have the gift of pastor-teacher. You cannot prove that I am not an angel in human form—who only continues to display weaknesses to make the deception more believable. You know that I am not an angel incarnate, but you cannot prove it. Surely you are aware that you cannot prove anything to someone is adamant about being a skeptic. How would you prove anything of the things above to an iterative skeptic or one that begins with skepticism? You know you can't! I will go into more of these epistemological issues in the next few months at FBC. For now, I will just say that when you heard the gospel and believed, it was the Holy Spirit that enabled you to connect with Prime Reality of God's love, forgiveness and perfect grace provision in the great work of Jesus Christ.

After you exercised the first virtue of faith, you gained the second virtue of hope, that is confidence. This is faith, but faith in the future. This would include hope/confidence in His many promises regarding salvation and receiving eternal life from God. Neither faith nor hope is some vague, inchoate, or subjective sentiment. They are both responses to God's revelation which comes with ___ (1:5) through the Holy Spirit. This theological virtue of hope was manifested in the Thessalonians throughout the letter that bears their name. Note how it was a natural result of true faith.

The third theological virtue is love. It is the greatest, the culmination of all other virtues. Reflect on how many times it comes up with reference to the Thessalonians as well as Paul and his companions. This is not a natural love; it is far superior. This is not the love, as the Beatles sang, "all you need is love." This is the love of God. However, before one can even understand the love of God, one has to understand how language works in respect to univocity and analogy. There is a sense in which all love is the same (univocity), yet when talking about God the predication of the term is always analogical. More on this when we get to philosophy of language. I will just say that this love of God is supernatural. No doubt, the Thessalonians had love for family and friends *before* they were saved. However, this love that comes from faith and hope is far greater.

Now, I would like for you to read 1 Thess. 4:13-18. This is the rapture passage. I would like for you to read it several times, especially verse 17. Note where the believers meet the Lord. I also want you to read about the tribulation in 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 6:15-17; 14:10; 19:15 and note the chronological connection between the rapture and tribulation. Note how the church is excluded from the wrath/tribulation of God on the world during the tribulation as is so vividly described in Revelation. Next, I would like for you to list four blessings of the rapture from verses 17-18. In the next lesson, we will look at the rapture a bit more.

In 'Ehyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove