



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG51: A Church Thrives In Troubled Times (3/5) *Strengthened In Every Good Deed*

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Home Group Study Notes

12th June 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Share with your Home Group something that has really made you smile since you last met together (it could be something at church; work; leisure; or something you watched on TV or read on a newspaper or magazine).



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1. Vs13b tells us that God chose us to be saved, and yet, when we decide to follow Jesus, it feels as though it is us who are choosing to be saved. Christians have always believed that, in some sense, both are true. Do you think we can ever eliminate this seeming contradiction?

2. If God know who will be saved and who will be lost, is there any point in us telling others about Jesus?

3. Vs13 also links together the work of the spirit and the truth revealed in the Word of God. It feels sometimes as if churches put more emphasis on one that the other. *If all you have is the word you will dry up, if all you have is the Spirit you will blow up, but if you have the word and the Spirit you will grow up.* What are the dangers of stressing only one? What good things happen when they are held together? How can you make sure they are both given prominence in your life?

Holding onto God's truth means living holy lives and Fire, in the Bible, is often used to illustrate purity. When God first appeared to Moses, He made himself known through a burning bush (Exodus 3:2). When God led the Israelites in the wilderness he led them by a pillar of fire at night (Exodus 13). And the tongues of fire at Pentecost symbolised the presence of God. Acts 2:3: *They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.* In the same way that precious metals are purified by being heated to such a high temperature that the impurities burn away, so does the Holy Spirit bring purity through His presence. And when, by faith, you take hold of God's truth, that faith is the power of God's Spirit to purify your life: your money-life, your sex-life, your professional-life, your leisure-life. *God chose you to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*

5) You have a God who Cares for You, vs16-17: But finally Paul says you have a God who cares for you, vs16-17: *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.* The word translated encouragement is quite a strong word. It is not the 'oh so very English, cheer up old chap' type of encouragement, it means strengthening, a fortifying so that we can get the job done. In the Bayeux tapestry relating the Battle of Hastings from the Norman's perspective, there is one figure in the battle, which is of Bishop Odo on his horse with a sword prodding the bottom of one of the Norman soldiers and the caption underneath reads, 'Bishop Odo encourages a soldier'. That is the kind of encouragement that God has in mind here. It's a strengthening of the heart, it's the giving of the ability to go on when we feel we can no longer do so, but we do. This is really a prayer of Paul, underscoring that God's sovereign care for his people and prayer for his people goes hand in hand. What God has promised, Paul prays for, and so are we to do the same.

Conclusion: In the film 'The Passion of the Christ' there's a really moving scene where Jesus falls to the ground carrying his cross and his mother runs up to him to be with him and he says: *'See mother, I'm making all things new.'*

And how we need 'all things made new' in our Christian lives, as we seek to serve the Lord in our world today. Especially when you consider, as we have done so during this series, the difficulties and opposition Christians around the world have to face. How do they cope when faced with the loss of job, loss of property, loss of family, even life, because of being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? How do they thrive in troubled times? We find the answer in vs13: *... through the sanctifying work of the Spirit ...*

It was the beginning of God doing a new thing in the lives of His disciples. Jesus is in the business of giving ordinary people an extraordinary purpose. He is committed to giving insignificant people a sense of God-given purpose so we can seize our destiny and fulfil our potential in Jesus. And how we need, just like those early disciples on that first Day of Pentecost, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to anoint us and empower us to be more effective in our mission and our evangelism, to strengthen our faith and Christian presence in our world as we serve our Heavenly Father, just as he has chosen and called us to do.

God wants you to overcome in life and one of the most important things we can understand is how the Word and the Spirit work together. *If all you have is the word you will dry up, if all you have is the Spirit you will blow up, but if you have the word and the Spirit you will grow up.*

3) You have a God who has Called You, vs14: Vs14: *He called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.* This calling is what God does when he puts his choosing into effect, in other words this is what God *does* in order to *make* you into a Christian. Now, it may happen over a period of time as you come along here Sunday by Sunday, join a home group, complete an alpha course ... until eventually the penny drops and you say, 'Yes, now I see it and I have to do something about it - make me yours Lord Jesus, take me, I want to follow you.' It can come as you are having a chat with a Christian friend over coffee at the kitchen table, or it can come with those lying on their death bed fighting for breath. As the Christian message is explained, God speaks through it and makes it *personal*: he calls *you* to serve him.

If you have internet access I am sure that you, like me, receive hoards of junk mail. One of the things I dislike about coming back from holiday is to have to sift through 100's of emails in my inbox and separate junk from mail – even if I do have a spam filter. Anyway, I don't know if the people who send these things out think I am dim, but there seems to be the belief that by printing my name at the top I am going to be hoodwinked into thinking these people have a personal interest in me. 'Dear Paul, you have been chosen to be the winner of a new Fiat Uno and all you have to do is phone this number to claim the prize'. Well, when the Gospel comes to us it isn't like that at all. It is more like receiving a personal, handwritten letter from a loved one full of affection and promise, so that your heart is stirred and you say: 'This is for *me*, God loves *me*, God wants *me*!' And if you find that happening to you, even this morning, embrace it because God is calling you to follow and serve him.

4) You have a God who Teaches You, vs15: Fourthly, Paul says you can be strengthened because you have a God who teaches you, vs15: *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings, we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.* It would be so easy up to this point to misunderstand what Paul is saying. Some folk point to all of what God has done and say, 'Well, if God loves me, chooses me and calls me, then I can put up my feet and relax and just "let go and let God"'. But that is not the conclusion Paul draws, quite the opposite: '*So then* (in the light of this) what are we to do? 'Stand firm and *hold on* to the teachings.'

Because Jesus has taken hold of us we are to hold on to him and we do that by paying attention to what he has to say through his word. And so, if we hold on to God's word, read it, understand it, practice it and pass them on to others - as Heroes and Trinity Tribe leaders are doing right now - *then* we shall make it to the end, because it is those who go along with false teaching, that won't make it, vs12. That is why Paul says what he says and why we have a tremendous responsibility to teach and hold on to the truth. As we hold on to the truth then God holds on to us.

4. Do you think there is an advantage or a disadvantage for a person to be young when he/she 'hears the call of God?' Share with your Home Group your own story of how you came to be aware of God at work in your life – and then thank and praise God for the encouragement and strength, vs17, that such sharing brings.

5. Share with your Home Group how it makes you feel to be: Loved; Chosen: Called; Taught and Cared for by your Heavenly Father.

6. The Holy Spirit fell on those first disciples because they had been waiting for Jesus' promise to be fulfilled. Spend some time in your home group waiting on God for a new experience of the Holy Spirit in your life. *Why not light some candles and play some worship music quietly in the background as you do so?* Take the opportunity to pray for, and with, each other, asking God for a fresh anointing upon each of you.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



**HG51: A Church Thrives In Troubled Times
(3/5) Strengthened In Every Good Deed**

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Home Group Sermon Notes

12th June 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul wanted to strengthen the confidence of the Thessalonian Christians and to encourage them to 'keep on keeping on.' And Paul gives five reasons why you can be 'strengthened in every good deed' which I trust that you will find as encouraging and as relevant to us today as I have:

1) You have a God who Loves You, vs13a: Look at how he begins this section in vs13a: *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord.* Paul uses a tense here which points to something which has happened in the past whose effect continues to operate in the present. And that something is when Jesus died on the cross. That is an event which we can point to and say: 'There, he did that for me!' That is why I can say I was loved - way back then - and that love keeps rolling on down, century after century, year after year, month after month, day after day, hour after: it is inexhaustible. And God is not going to let that love come to nothing by allowing us to get hoodwinked and brow beaten by false teachers and 'men of lawlessness' (2:1-12).

2) You have a God who has Chosen You, vs13b: Vs13b: *...from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.* We sometimes talk, don't we, about making a decision for Jesus, and that is all well and good and an important part of our journey of faith and our testimony (I'm sure those who shared their testimonies a couple of weeks ago spoke of when they made a decision for Jesus). However, here Paul speaks of something far more significant and that is that Jesus is making a decision for us. Have you ever thought of it like that? From the beginning (of time?) God decided upon saving Paul Carr. Amazing.

Why did he do that? Well, why did he decide on rescuing the Jews when there were plenty of other nations subject to political oppression. Ah, you say, he did that because he had promised Abraham to have a people. But that just pushes the question back one stage, for why did he choose Abraham, there were plenty of other moon worshippers in Mesopotamia back in 2000BC. The short answer is that God simply chooses - that is what he does. Of course, he doesn't *have* to choose anyone, but he does, and he often chooses the most unprepossessing, awkward, unlikely people not least because that shows we are chosen not because we have merit but because God loves mercy. *Good chooses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise.*

And there is something reassuring about that. To know that my salvation ultimately rests on *God's* choice gives me a kind of security because the God of the Bible is not some fickle God who changes his mind according to circumstances or even the strength or lack of it of my faith. He simply reaffirms, 'I have chosen you'. But you say, 'That is easy enough to believe when things are going fine, but when I hit a crisis, when my family are ill, when my daughter goes off the rails, when my church seems less than ideal, I begin to doubt that, so how can I *know* he has really chosen me?' Well, look at what this choosing entails: 'God chose you to be saved through the *sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*' In other words, when God chooses you to be saved he brings about *changes*.

People have often said to me, especially as I was growing up, how much I am like my father. I guess by that they mean that I only look like him - I have his nose. However, to those who know me and my father well it means something more. They are suggesting that, in many ways, I am like him in character, in the way I see things and in the way I react to circumstances and people. They see, in a very real sense that my father lives on in me. People might even say that I have his spirit. However, with all the recent discoveries of genetic science this, somehow, remains a mystery. We are alike in the physical sense - flesh and blood. We share a physiological framework of chromosomes, electrons and neutrons - though it's not something that I can describe accurately, let alone explain! However, there is overwhelming tangible evidence that I am, indeed, my father's son, both physically and emotionally.

And similarly, as we spend time in the presence of God, the Holy Spirit transforms us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18: *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* It's not that we become perfect immediately, but over a period of time there is that internal change brought about by the Holy Spirit making you more holy, so that things which you used to cling to you now let go of and other things you would have never thought of doing in a million years you find yourself drawn towards like truth telling, sexual fidelity, kindness, prayer, sharing your faith, being in a place like this every Sunday. Certainly, you have not got it all together (who has?). Sure there are things you still haven't let go of and other things you yet to take on board, but there has been some changes haven't there? All of these things come about by a supernatural work of God's Spirit. So, be amazed and encouraged because that means *God* has chosen you.

Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-off experience. Peter was filled with the Spirit three times in the space of chapters 2-4 in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 31). When Paul says, 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5:18) he uses the present continuous tense, urging us to go on and on being filled with the Spirit. Charles Spurgeon was once asked why he preached on the need for more of the Holy Spirit: *Because I leak,* he replied. I need more of the Holy Spirit, because I, too, leak! Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, preaching at his enthronement in January 1975 said: *We know something of the power of the Holy Spirit. We are open to learn more of Him. We await the surprises of tomorrow.*