

**THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS**  
**"Part XLIII: 1 Thessalonians - Helping Converts From Paganism"**

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) While recently visiting a parishioner, she shared with me that an unsaved relative who had noted many catastrophic events in recent weeks had called her and asked point blank, "What's going on in this country?!" She referred to some electrical blackouts in the far west. Along with those blackouts have been the catastrophes of the Value Jet crash in the Florida everglades, the downing and death of all of TWA's flight 800 off of Long Island and the bombing at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. We don't know for sure what caused the TWA jet's crash and the FBI is not sure who is responsible for the Atlanta bombing. **Things are just in a state of flux in our troubled world!**

(2) I stood at the check-out stand at Southington's Home Depot store last Monday as I was purchasing some items for a bathroom job I am doing, when suddenly, through the open carport, a shouting match took place between two construction men over whose truck had to move to make way for the other's. I was shocked to see grown men acting this way, and the lady at the cash register simply told me, "We have to keep our head down here!" indicating that this goes on all the time! Wednesday, after a Board meeting, Duane Doot shared with us an incredible interaction with personnel he has faced on a commercial job he is doing, an interaction that makes him tempted not to take future commercial jobs! **We live in an increasingly decaying BUSINESS world!**

(3) Because of the decay in our world, new converts to Christ bring all sorts of "baggage" into the Church that needs to be addressed! We hear of massive problems of immorality amongst Christians as some are going into homosexuality or open adultery. Dissatisfaction in the workplace abounds! As I prepared this message Tuesday, two different believers came into my office to share their concerns over incredibly difficult problems **believers** were having with gross immorality and great unhappiness in the business realm!

**With growing problems in our decaying culture, and with believers coming from increasingly paganized backgrounds with all sorts of excess "baggage" left over from that heritage, HOW are they to be helped, and WHO does this?**

(We turn to the "Need" section in our sermon . . .)

**Need:** *"There is so much DECAY in today's world system that even new Christians often experience discouragement and defeat with the 'baggage' they carry over from godless origins! Is there a guide on edifying NEW believers in Christ in view of their secular origins?!"*

- I. **Man's historical decline into sin's chaos has so corrupted today's culture that new believers face a battle in just LIVING for God!**
  - A. Though God created the world and set up man as His deputy, sin deposed him, and Satan became ruler on earth, Gen. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.
  - B. God renewed human history by the Noahic Flood, Gen. 6:1-9:7.
  - C. Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod, began an apostasy opposing God's rule on earth, Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9; Rev. 12:1-3.
  - D. God thus chose Abraham to start a nation to check his sin, Gn. 12:1-3.
  - E. Yet, the Old Testament records not only that nation, Israel's repeated failure to curb Nimrod's error, but her tendency to be corrupted by it in spite of God's discipline to the contrary, Gn. 12:4-Malachi.
  - F. When God sent Jesus, Israel's long-awaited Messiah, Israel rejected Him, so God postponed the Kingdom's installation and carried on its recruitment program through the Church, The Gospels and Acts.
  - G. However, with Israel's Kingdom **postponed**, Gentile believers from **ages** of apostasy in pagan culture faced hurdles in just **living** for God:
    1. When Paul evangelized pagans in Thessalonica, evil persecutors stirred up legal trouble, necessitating his hurried evacuation to protect his new converts, B.K.C., N.T., p. 688; Acts 17:1-10a.
    2. This left new converts from centuries of dark paganism without their spiritual leader having had enough time to establish solid church leadership for their edification, Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, p. 1697!
- II. **God used the stress on these "orphaned" spiritual babes fresh from century's old paganism to make Paul write a letter to them which shows US how to nurture new converts out of dark paganism!**
  - A. Paul first expressed his love and support to these converts, 1:1-3:13:
    1. Following a warm greeting (1:1), Paul expressed his appreciation for the genuine conversion of these new converts, 1:2-10.
    2. He went on to defend his slandered character, 1 Thess. 2:1-12.
    3. In an extended section of the letter, Paul expressed his warm relief upon hearing that in his absence, these new converts had continued to serve the Lord and hold Paul in high esteem, 2:13-3:13.
  - B. With his need to give these converts as **much** input **quickly**, Paul laid out the **BASICS** of Christian living in a **NUTSHELL**, 4:1, 2-12:
    1. These converts were to **offset** learned pagan sexual dysfunctions in meeting sexual needs by **properly** courting their **spouses**, 4:2-8.

2. They were to **offset** learned pagan social dysfunctions by excelling at Christian **love** in the **Church**, 4:9-10.
  3. They were to **offset** learned pagan employment dysfunctions with a **work ethic**: (a) they were to avoid freeloading with its abuses by **themselves working** to earn their own livelihoods, 4:11; (b) this effort would win one a good **testimony** (4:12a) and supply him with an inbuilt business incentive (Prov. 16:26 NIV) and personal control over his enterprise to equip him to **make** a living, 4:11-12.
- C. To comfort these converts fresh from the hopelessness of paganism as some of them had died, Paul detailed the **Pretribulation Rapture**:
1. These converts from hopeless paganism worried that fellow deceased believers would **miss** God's coming **Kingdom** with them, 4:13a. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, fn. to 1 Thess. 4:13-18)
  2. Paul comforted them by detailing the Church's rapture: (a) the translation of **dead** believers even **precedes** that of the living, 4:13-18! (b) Paul said it was needless to detail the Tribulation that came before the Kingdom as **Christians** were **not** going to be **IN** it, 5:1-5, 9. He touched on the Tribulation Period **briefly** to **comfort** the Thessalonians over the trauma **all** believers, living or dead (5:10) would **miss** en route to joining Christ in His Messianic Kingdom, 5:1-10, 11. (Thus, the rapture is **Pretribulation!**)
  3. Paul closed with specific directives about various needs, 5:12-28.
- III. **1 Thessalonians adds to the "thread of redemption" by noting that the "Rapture" deliverance from this troubled world for believers predicted by Jesus in John 14:2-3 is also PRETRIBULATIONAL!**

**Application:** (1) *If we carry "baggage" from a secular heritage so that we wonder where to start to obtain a decent life, (a) believe on Christ as Savior from sin, Jn. 3:16. Then, (b) follow the lead of reputable, warm, godly believers (c) who promote holy and skilled living in family, church and business realms and (d) who anticipate the Rapture as their hope beyond this life! (2) Once helped, BE an exemplary help, a "Christian Big Brother" to other new converts!*

**Lesson:** *New converts to Christ from paganism need (1) personal warmth from mature, respected believers followed by (2) rapid teaching from them on (a) Christian living in a nutshell re: family, church and business (b) with a dose of the Rapture's hope as motivation to live well!*

**Conclusion:** (To illustrate the message . . . )

On the 12th of April, after having struck an iceberg, 1,500 people stood on the decks of the "unsinkable" Titanic, unable to find more lifeboats or lifebelts, and facing certain death. There was nothing left to do but to wait for the end. But in this hopeless situation, those people found help.

That help began back in 1841, 60 years before! Then, a woman named Sarah Adams wrote a hymn for her pastor who needed a hymn to go along with a sermon he was doing out of Genesis. Her sister, Eliza, wrote the melody and it was sung and later published.

Lowell Mason, a prolific church and school music writer, took the song and put a new tune to it in 1856, and the hymn became an immediate favorite.

When the President of the United States, President William McKinley lay dying of an assassin's bullet in 1901, his family heard him whisper the chorus of the hymn by saying, "Nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee." Accordingly, at his funeral, the hymn was sung and widely popularized.

That explains why, just 11 years later, when the Titanic that was supposed to be unsinkable was nevertheless sinking and 1,500 people on board ship had no more life boats or lifebelts, and faced sure death by staying on the ship, they turned for solace to this hymn popularized at President McKinley's death. The ship's band struck up the melody, and hundreds of doomed people on board sang, "Nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee." With this hymn there was hope and guidance, the 1,500 people did not panic as the ship went down! (Pamela J. Kennedy, Hymns of Faith and Inspiration, Ideals, p. 16-17)

**In the same way, an adherence to God's basic truths on life and the hope hereafter will always minister to those who are lost or just coming to Christ from incredibly hopeless, secular and needy backgrounds!**