Week 43 is scheduled for study Oct. 16-22, 2023. This week is all about perfecting our faith, which means healing or filling in the gaps where our faith is weak or lacking.

Day 1

If we do not record the impressions we receive from the Spirit, we might forget them. What does the Spirit prompt you to record as you read 1 and 2 Thessalonians?

1 Thessalonians 1-2 - Disciples of Christ serve others with sincerity and love.

Over and over again Paul tells the Saints that when they (as missionaries) came preaching the gospel among them they were exemplary in their behavior. They were very careful not to be a burden on others. This means the missionaries had to work day and night to support themselves as much as possible so as not to burden others for their support. Remember that the apostles were to travel without purse or script, so no money, clothing, walking sticks, nothing. The Lord required that they rely on the mercy and generosity of others to supply them with their needs or wants.

Paul very pointedly tells the members of the Church that they set the example for them as to how a Saint is supposed to behave. The verses where Paul describes the missionaries' own behavior also include comments that tell us that they both expected and saw the members learn from their behavioral examples and copy them in their own

lives. We should be serving others as we have seen the apostles serve others. I don't know if you have noticed, but when you see almost any picture of an apostle serving others there is a look of pure joy on their face.

As a side note, it occurs to me that as hard as the missionaries worked to not be a burden on anyone else, they were also willing to accept all the help they needed from their fellow members. They learned quickly the difference between a real need and just a mild want. Paul even went so far in these letters to tell the Saints that those who weren't willing to work should not be allowed to eat, for they had contributed nothing. This is an important point, because they had all things in common, so it wouldn't be fair for someone to contribute nothing, but take all that they wanted. That isn't how the united order works. That is how socialism works.

The part where we work hard serving others doesn't seem to be difficult to grasp for most of us. We seem to get that part. It is the part where we learn when to graciously accept the efforts of others on our behalf that is more difficult to learn. Giving and receiving in the gospel of Christ are the two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately, we too often treat them as being completely unrelated and opposites from each other. They are, in fact, closely tied to each other. When we learn to receive we also gain a greater appreciation for what we can do for someone else. Our empathy, tolerance, generosity, and a host of other virtues grow as we learn what it takes to receive with gratitude. So serving and receiving aren't opposites at all, but are as closely related as the two sides of the same coin. Where does one end and the other begin? How can you truly separate them as though they have nothing to do with each other? Like night and day, there is a host of in between that connects the two where night and day bleed into one another.

Besides the important lesson of learning to serve one another in love, the Saints also needed to be careful of the doctrine, since there were those who sought to corrupt the teachings of the Church. From day one there were Jews who sought to infiltrate the Christian congregations and steer them back to Judaism. Keeping the doctrine clean and pure is part of caring for one another.

Day 2

If we do not record the impressions we receive from the Spirit, we might forget them. What does the Spirit prompt you to record as you read 1 and 2 Thessalonians?

1 Thessalonians 3:7-13; 4:1-12 - Increase and abound in love.

Here are a couple of points to consider as you think about today's lesson.

Holiness and Sanctification - These two words are often used interchangeably. Both words refer to purity and moral integrity. And both words are used regularly to describe those things that are set apart as special or represent goodness and the qualities of God. The opposite of wicked Paul says is holiness. We would say righteous is the opposite of wicked. There is no contradiction here, because the words righteous and holy are synonymous with each other. This is why the Lord often calls His people holy, because of all people we are supposed to be the ones to be righteous. According to the scriptures, those who keep the commandments are righteous or holy.

Abound - The word comes from Latin and refers to waves. The nature of waves is that they are constant, never ending, always being replenished. The Celtic equivalent is a fountain, which paints a very similar mental picture to the Latin definition. Paul has already praised the Thessalonian Saints for their goodness and charity. Now he is telling them they need to increase their goodness more and more, so they become more godly. To abound is to have something in great abundance, and Paul tells the Saints that he just wants to "perfect that which is lacking in [their] faith".

Don't get Paul wrong here. He isn't telling the Saints they aren't doing a good job of being Christians. He wants them to go from being good to being better than just good. In other words, he wants them to never stop trying to be more Christlike. They already have a good reputation among all the Saints in the surrounding countries of being charitable and kind to all. Paul just doesn't want them to get spiritually lazy and stop trying to be better today than they were yesterday.

Speaking of myself as though I was speaking for everyone, too often I stop being deliberate in my efforts to improve. I begin to coast and get lazy about my discipleship. In other words, I stop abounding in love like I should be doing. I temporarily stop being like a wave of charity towards others and withdraw from loving others to just entertain myself or to do those things that feel good at the time. I stop making progress spiritually until I recognize my stupor of thought and become active about improving myself again. Improving spiritually takes conscientious thought and deliberateness of action. Becoming truly holy and sanctified before God never has, does, nor will happen

by accident. Righteousness or holiness is achieved only through purposeful and deliberate choices and actions.

Day 3

If we do not record the impressions we receive from the Spirit, we might forget them. What does the Spirit prompt you to record as you read 1 and 2 Thessalonians?

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; 5:1-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10 - If I am faithful and watchful, I will be prepared for the Savior's Second Coming.

Since Jesus ascended to heaven in Jerusalem, and the responsibility of moving the Church of God forward in all the earth fell on the shoulders of the Apostles, every generation has looked forward to the day of Christ's return. All have hoped that it would be in their day and time, even though so many prophecies had to be fulfilled first. We fall into the same category. There are many prophecies that still need to be fulfilled before his return, yet we continue to focus on being ready, luggage in hand, standing on the doorstep when he arrives. (A little exaggeration there, but you get the picture.)

Why do the Brethren still teach us that we need to be ready for his return? This is the same doctrine that has been taught for more than 2000 years now. If ever there was a generation that had a right to believe that he might return in their lifetime, it is ours. At least we live in the correct dispensation for it to happen.

Don't get me wrong. I have always been taught, and have been led to hope and believe that it might actually be in my lifetime. But the older I get and the more I come to understand in the scriptures, I begin to doubt I will be alive for the event. So what does that mean for me? Why all this hype about being ready and being watchful? There is actually a lot of wisdom in that mindset, no matter what century you live in.

Preparation

The promise of the scriptures is that those who have died in Christ, meaning those who have died having lived their lives as obedient and covenant making children of God, will be raised from the dead at the beginning of his coming. Only after the righteous

dead are raised will the righteous living be caught up into the skies with the raised dead to meet Jesus in the air as he comes.

> 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
>
> 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

What does this tell me? It tells me that no matter when we live we will all be there for his second coming. Whether we are alive on that day or have been dead for centuries, he will raise us up to join him. If that is the case then what is my worry? My worry is that he will only raise the righteous, those who are or have been covenant keepers in their lifetime.

The lesson for me in all this is that no matter when I die I need to be ready to join the Savior when he returns. It doesn't matter if I am alive at the time. None of us actually die, as in ceasing to exist, for if I die before that day I will be busy serving the Lord and my fellows in the spirit world. Death is only trading one living space for another. All of us will be there on that day. The question is, where will I be with the spiritual slackers or with the valiant and righteous who are ready to be caught up to join him in his return? Hence the need for all of us to be watchful and in a constant state of preparation so we are prepared for that special day.

Day 4

If we do not record the impressions we receive from the Spirit, we might forget them. What does the Spirit prompt you to record as you read 1 and 2 Thessalonians?

2 Thessalonians 2 - An apostasy, or falling away from truth, was prophesied to precede the Second Coming.

The manual has a great list of scriptures for you to read about the prophecies of the apostasy, as well as scriptures showing that it had already begun in Paul's day. The quotes from a couple of reformers are also informative. If you read the accounts of those who taught the gospel as soon as the Restoration began you will find many references to the general belief among Protestants that the general apostasy that took

place in the early centuries of Christianity required that a Restitution or Reformation take place. Some, like Roger Williams recognized that the Church of Christ had gotten so far off track that only a full fledged Restoration would do what was necessary to get back to Christ's original teachings.

FHE/Personal Study

2 Thessalonians 3:13 - Be not weary in well doing.

I find the expression about being weary in well doing to be curious. The expression states, at least in my mind, that doing good things is something we have to do, and sometimes it just becomes difficult to keep forcing ourselves to have to be good each day. I guess whether that statement is true or false is not the issue here. Even for those who genuinely delight in being and doing good all day, every day, there are times when the responsibilities and challenges of doing good can become somewhat overwhelming. We get tired and want a vacation from the constant demand on our goodness, for there is always more need than there are those to relieve that need.

It is in these times when even the most stout hearted do-gooder needs some encouragement and support. This is when we turn to Christ and seek strength from he from whom all goodness flows. It is in these times that the Spirit gives us not only peace, but strength and desire to continue in the course we have chosen, to help those who need it most. This help to us may come in the form of patience to not say what we feel like saying to someone who needs our forbearance at that moment. It may come in the form of a renewed desire to put our personal want of rest second to the needs of someone who is without a place to sleep or who is in need of a listening ear or who is in want of work. Some just need to feel wanted, others are cantankerous and need the perseverance only a friend can provide. The list of needs is so long and never ending.

What we need to remember is that the Lord understands that we are not always up for the task at hand, for we are imperfect people. He also wants us to remember that when we turn to Him we can have our hearts changed and our dispositions realigned so that we actually have a desire to continue on in doing what we otherwise would have abandoned, because it is hard to do. God increases our capacity for doing good. This is all part of His promise to uphold us and to answer our prayers when we seek him in honesty and humility. He will make us into new creatures in Christ. Eventually, we will

become people who never weary in well doing, but that is something most of us need to work toward.

Improving Personal Study

Seek revelation daily

Even though I know better, I still tend to think of having revelation as visions of the eternities, angelic visitations, and dreams where the heavens open and people start descending to teach me things. I have had none of those things. Does that mean I have never had revelation? Of course not.

The definition of revelation is to have something made manifest or apparent to us that we didn't know or understand before. When the Spirit opens the eyes of our understanding and we grasp a concept better than before, that is revelation. If we feel the need to do something that will benefit someone else, that is revelation. When we feel joy in reading the scriptures or become overwhelmed with gratitude for God's mercies, again it is revelation. Any interaction with the Holy Spirit, in any form, is in my book revelation. It is in these interchanges with the Spirit that our hearts are changed, our eyes opened to spiritual truths, and our lives made happier by our connection to God's Spirit.

Revelation can come in many, many ways. It is up to us to seek these golden opportunities to have the Spirit work with us to make us better and better each day. Whether giving or receiving a blessing in faith, feeling what to say to a neighbor who needs to hear something from the Spirit, or how we approach dealing with a stranger, all of it is part of our partnership with Christ to bring people to him. And all of it is most joyously done when the Spirit is present. And even if we do something good without the Spirit actually present for it, our doing good invites Him to come. It is a win win all the way around.

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