



LESSON IV.—JANUARY 25.

Paul's Counsel to the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians v., 14-28.

Golden Text.

Hold fast that which is good.—1 Thessalonians v., 21.

Home Readings

Monday, Jan. 19.—1 Thess. v., 1-13.
 Tuesday, Jan. 20.—1 Thess. v., 14-28.
 Wednesday, Jan. 21.—1 Thess. i., 1-10.
 Thursday, Jan. 22.—1 Thess. ii., 1-9.
 Friday, Jan. 23.—1 Thess. ii., 10-20.
 Saturday, Jan. 24.—1 Thess. iii., 12-4, 8.
 Sunday, Jan. 25.—1 Thess. iv., 9-18.

(By R. M. Kurtz, Editor 'Union Gospel News'.)

14. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

15. See that none render evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

16. Rejoice evermore.

17. Pray without ceasing.

18. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

19. Quench not the Spirit.

20. Despise not prophesyings.

21. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

22. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

23. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

25. Brethren, pray for us.

26. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

27. I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

28. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Time, Places and Circumstances.

It will be remembered that last week's lesson described briefly Paul's successful work at Thessalonica, from which place he was compelled to flee, on account of the opposition to the Gospel, led by Jews who refused to accept the truth. We also learned that he and his companions, Silas and Timothy, were soon at Berea, where the Gospel received a better reception, and where many Jews and Gentiles were converted. Still, if you read a few verses beyond those appointed for last week's lesson, you at once discovered that the enemies of the Gospel at Thessalonica pursued him and his work to Berea, and Paul had to leave there also, though Silas and Timothy remained for a time at Berea, probably because Paul, being the leading spirit of the work, attracted the opposition mainly to himself, so that when he had gone, his less prominent companions were not molested.

When he left Berea he went to Athens, where the famous sermon on Mars' Hill was delivered. Soon after we find him at Corinth, not far away to the west of Athens. His two fellow-workers had been sent for and soon joined him. While here Paul wrote this first letter to the Thessalonians, and it is thought to be the first of all of his epistles which we have. Its date was probably about 51 A.D., though it is not positively known.

As we noted last week, Paul desired to do more work in person at Thessalonica, but could not return, perhaps because another disturbance might occur and serious trouble be brought upon some of the brethren there. However, he sent Timothy to comfort and encourage the young church. In 1 Thessalonians iii., 1, 2, he says, 'Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and of Christ to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith.'

Timothy afterward brought back good tidings of the condition of the Thessalonian Church, and Paul later wrote them this letter. It is full of cheer, encouragement and instruction. In this lesson we have especially assigned for study only the last fifteen verses of the epistle.

Let us take the first verse of the lesson, verse 14, 'And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be long-suffering toward all men.' These exhortations to admonish, comfort, support, etc., refer to the members of the church. Merely belonging to the church is not enough to strengthen one's character, any more than it is enough to assure his salvation. Many people make the mistake of thinking that, because they have gone through the ceremony of uniting with the church, everything is therefore finished. They should understand that such a step is taken only for the sake of helping them on to higher and better things.

In verse 15 we are reminded of the Golden Rule. We are not to return evil for evil, but to do good to all men, both in the church and out of it.

Verse 16 seems strange as a distinct command, 'Rejoice evermore.' Farrar speaks of the age in which Paul lived as one 'so sombre that many Gentiles hailed as a special boon the possibility of suicide as an open door of escape granted them from intolerable misery.' The church was beginning to supersede Judaism, and was just entering the great conflict with the idolatrous and superstitious beliefs of that day. Great suffering and persecution were before it. Yet in the face of all this they were commanded to 'rejoice always,' as the Revised Version has it. But the Christians had reason to rejoice. The spiritually minded Gentiles especially, appreciated the difference between the Gospel and the vile and empty forms of religion about them. There was no other religion that offered pardon, peace, infinite love, as a result of faith in a divine being. No other religion showed them a God so tender and compassionate that he would give his only son as a sacrifice that men might be rescued from sin and its consequences.

It is not surprising that the Thessalonian Christians were urged to 'pray without ceasing.' Situated as they were, they certainly needed to pray constantly for help, that their faith might not be shaken, that they might have courage and strength to endure hardship, and that others might be won. They were never to give up the habit of prayer. There was to be a free and open line of communication between the believer and the heavenly father. Those of you who have studied the electric telegraph know that, whether a message is actually passing over the wire or not, the electric current is flowing over it constantly. The conditions for sending a message are available every moment. Sometimes the wire is broken some place and the current is interrupted; then communication ceases. The prayer spirit is to be constant, it is a habitual attitude toward God, so that we may speak to him at any time. Our own sins sometimes break connections. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me,' Psalms lxvi., 18. The heart often prays when no words are formed by lips or mind, for its relation to God may be so unbroken and so close that he catches the unworried longing of the soul.

'In everything give thanks,' is to some perhaps a hard verse. A weak and narrow heart gives thanks only for an actual comfort or piece of good fortune received, but a great and noble one is thankful for the love of God, whether God always gives him

what he would like to have or not. If he dwells in peace and comfort, he thanks God for that, but if sorrow or persecution comes, he is thankful for an opportunity to witness and suffer for his faith. Moreover, we are told in the same verse that it is the will of God in Christ Jesus that we should give thanks in everything. Through Christ we are able to have this spirit of faith and gratitude, no matter what comes.

'Quench not the Spirit,' continues Paul. The Spirit of God is given to guide, strengthen and comfort us. If we quench it by evil thoughts or deeds, it is like neglecting or throwing overboard the compass of a ship. The compass is a delicate, easily broken, instrument, but one very essential in sailing upon the seas and great lakes of the world. So the spirit is essential to our spiritual safety.

Paul places a high value upon prophecy, and elsewhere exhorts his hearers to covet this gift. In 1 Corinthians xiv., 3, he says, 'But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.' To prophesy, as Paul uses the term here, does not mean merely the foretelling of events, but rather the gift of teaching and exhorting. Paul warns against despising the utterances of men thus gifted, for they speak the messages of God.

Verse 21. The idea is that we are to examine what is told us to see if it is in accord with the will of God.

To abstain from 'every appearance of evil' would be to settle every question about conduct in the right way. Many professing Christians, especially the younger people, are constantly trying to find how far they can go without sin. The true idea is to strive to keep as far away from sin as possible. If there is some doubt about this or that pleasure, avoid it rather than risk your own spiritual safety and perhaps lead a weaker brother into danger.

Now Paul's words take another tone; instead of continuing his exhortations he utters a prayer for the Thessalonians to whom he is more directly speaking. In the Revised Version this is, 'And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' He then assures us of the faithfulness of God who calls us, and who can preserve us as he has just prayed.

The closing verses of the lesson are the closing verses of the epistle. Paul does not close his letter without asking the prayers of his Christian brethren. He realized that he could not carry on his work in his own strength, and desired the intercession of other Christians in his behalf. He also tells them to greet all the brethren 'with a holy kiss.' This was the form of salutation among the Christians of those early times, and was a symbol of their affection one toward another. The apostle then charges that his letter be read to all the brethren. Every one, not a select few, were to have free hearing of this early portion of the New Testament. The last verse is a benediction, much like those by which our churches are dismissed to-day. 'The grace' means the loving care, and favor of Christ, which Paul desired should rest upon them.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Jan. 25.—Topic—An evening with Chinese missions. Acts xvii., 24-31.

Birthday Letters.

(Griffith Thomas.)

A record of our scholars' birthdays should be kept, and a letter sent (by post, please) to each, so as to arrive first thing on the morning of the day. The letter should be as bright and cheery as possible; and always contain a personal word of loving appeal for Christ, if the scholar has not yet decided, or an equally loving word of counsel, if Christ is already accepted as Saviour. It is impossible to exaggerate the value of birthday letters. They will be kept and valued for years.