

keep them up and help them along. *Long-suffering toward all* (Rev. Ver.); forbearing with them, as God does with ourselves. *None render evil for evil.* The Christian, though wronged, must do no wrong, Matt. 5 : 38, 39 ; Rom. 12 : 17. Forgiveness is the virtue most characteristic of Christianity, as revenge is the vice most natural in unrenewed human nature. *Follow that which is good.* Make the welfare of others your unceasing aim. *Among yourselves* ; within the circle of believers. *To all* ; those without the church, including even the fiercest persecutors. The Thessalonian Christians were receiving much evil from those round about them (1 Thess. 2 : 14, 15), as had been the case with Paul himself (Acts 17 : 5, etc.). The only way to overcome evil, the apostle tells them, is by good. To render evil for evil is to create two evils in the place of one. Anger awakens anger, and hate incites hate. Good is to be the Christian's ideal in all that he does.

II. The Christian and God, 16-24.

Vs. 16-18. These verses contain the marching orders of Christians. *Rejoice always* (Rev. Ver.). "The New Testament . . . is the book of infinite joy." The Christian life, as pictured in it, is one of perpetual gladness. (See Matt. 5 : 10-12 ; Rom. 5 : 3-5 ; Phil. 4 : 4 ; 1 Pet. 4 : 12-14.) *Pray without ceasing* ; not always in words, but in the constant lifting of the heart to God. Paul took all his affairs to God, ch. 1 : 3 ; 2 : 13. *In every thing give thanks.* If we remember that all blessings come from God, and that He causes the ills of life to work for His people's good (Rom. 8 : 28), thanksgiving will not be difficult. *The will of God* ; that all these graces of joy and prayerfulness and thanksgiving abound in you. *In Christ Jesus* ; our Example in all virtues, and our Helper in the practice of them.

Vs. 19, 20. *Quench not the Spirit* ; of whom fire is an emblem (Acts 2 : 3), therefore He may be "quenched", that is, driven away from us by sin, hardness of heart, neglect, or worldliness. *Despise not prophesyings* ; messages from God through inspired men (see Rom. 12 : 6 ; 1 Cor. 12 : 10 ; 14 : 1-5),—one of the gifts of the Spirit.

Vs. 21, 22. *Prove all things* ; that is, the

sayings of the "prophets". These are to be tested as a banker tests a coin. *Hold fast . . . good* ; as one would keep a genuine coin of sterling value. *Abstain from every form of evil* (Rev. Ver.) ; keep clear of sin of whatever sort.

Vs. 23, 24. *The God of peace* (Rev. Ver.) ; the peace of reconciliation with God, through Jesus Christ, by which we became Christians (see Eph. 2 : 14-17). *Sanctify you* ; make you holy as He Himself is, 1 Pet. 1 : 15. *Wholly* ; to the fullest extent. Sanctification is a lifelong process. *Spirit and soul and body.* Paul's desire is that all parts of the nature be penetrated by the Spirit of God. *Entire, without blame* (Rev. Ver.). Along with "wholly", these words show how complete and thoroughgoing is the holiness Paul seeks for the Thessalonians. *Coming of our Lord Jesus* ; in judgment. The holiness Paul has in mind is such as will endure His searching gaze. *Faithful is he* ; to all His promises. *Will do it.* If he calls us into the Christian life, He will also make that life perfect in us.

Light from the East

THOSE OVER YOU—Nearly all the governments of that time were despotisms. The rulers of the Jewish Church had absolute power over their people, and the elders of the early Christian Church exercised very great authority over all the members. When they inflicted discipline, the pain of exclusion from the ordinances of the church was very much feared. Those excluded would lie all night at the elders' doors, beseeching and praying with many tears that they might be restored. Later, when episcopacy had spread over the church, obedience to the church rules was extolled as the cardinal virtue. Paul urges an attitude of affectionate respect ; but the Fathers of the early church command absolute obedience. Ignatius says, "Ye are subject to your bishops as to Jesus Christ, so without your bishop ye should do nothing, also be subject to your presbyters as to the apostles of Jesus Christ our Hope". "He that does anything without the bishop, presbyters, and deacons is not pure in his conscience." It was teaching like this that prepared the way for the spiritual despotism of the Greek and Roman Catholic churches.