I THESSALONIANS 5:22

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GENERAL CONTEXT

The epistles of I & II Thessalonians are called "the eschatological epistles" of Paul, and are believed to be among the earliest writings of the New Testament. I Thessalonians was written approximately A.D.52 from Corinth, soon after Paul had visited that city.

In Paul's day Thessalonica was an important city. Under Roman rule, it was the capital of the newly formed province and its largest city had a population of about 200,000. Being along the Egnatian road, the city was part of a great Roman military highway. Its location provided it with a sheltered harbor (made into a naval station) and a natural outlet for traffic from all points. This caused much commercial traffic to pass through the city, resulting in Thessalonica becoming a wealthy city - one to be desired for commercial advantages (cp.Acts 17:4). Being a seaport city, Thessalonica brought in an influx of mixed nationalities, mixed religions and mixed moral standards. With Thessalonica's reputation for evil & licentiousness, Paul would need to make a special appeal for chaste living. Thessalonica was a free city and enjoyed autonomy in its internal affairs since it was only ruled by politarchs (Acts 17:6). This political privilege was jealously guarded by the people, and make them extremely sensitive about anything that might result in imperial disfavor (Ryrie p.9)(cp.Acts 17:7).

While on his second missionary journey, Paul (along with Silas and Timothy) entered a synagogue of the Jews and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures" (Acts 17:2). He preached the necessity of the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah (Christ), and apparently discussed Jesus Christ as being "King", or at least this was the way his message was interpreted (Acts 17:3,7). The initial converts to Paul's preaching were "a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women (Acts 17:4)". However in opposition to this evangelistic effort, jealous Jews formed a mob, and started a riot saying, "These men who have upset the world have come here also" (Acts 17:5-6). This opposition forced Paul to go to Berea (17:10) where he had a fruitful ministry among Jews who were described as "more noble than those in Thessalonica". However when news of this reached the

Thessalonian Jews "they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds" which forced Paul on to Athens (17:13-15). While Paul was in Athens, he requested that Silas and Timothy come to him at once (17:15). They apparently did so, but he must have shortly sent both of them back, Timothy to Thessalonica (I Th.3:1-3), and Silas probably to Philippi.

Paul, having been forced to depart the infant church so quickly was concerned about the flock which had no experienced leadership.
Later when Timothy returned to Paul from Thessalonica, he brought back good news regarding their faith and love and their good relations with Paul (I Th.3:6). However he also brought back some disquieting news. Persecutions were still raging (2:17-3:10); For some heathen sexual impurity was a temptation (4:1-8; 5:19-21); For others, grief over the death of loved ones was a problem. Because some died before Christ returned, many feared that the deceased might have missed something that was promised at the coming of Christ (I Th.4:13,18).

The occasion for writing to the Thessalonians was in response to Timothy's report. Thessalonians is a letter from a relieved, grateful, yet concerned shepherd for his growing flock.
Neither in the Thessalonian epistles nor in Philippians does Paul add his title "apostle". This may be due to a special friendship between him and the Macedonian churches and because his authority was never seriously questioned in these regions. Paul's close relationship and concern for these believers is evident as seen in: his anxiety about his converts (3:1,2); his earnest desire for their spiritual good (3:8-11); his parental tenderness (2:7); his joy when he hears from Timothy of the steadfastness of their faith (3:6,7); and his sympathy with them in their distress (4:13,18).

As in all of Paul's letters the situation at Thessalonica determined to a large extent the purpose for this epistle. Thus Paul wrote to commend them for evidence for true faith; to defend himself against the charges of his enemies (by station the genuine, sincerity and honesty he displayed in his ministry); to encourage them in their suffering (persecution); to exhort them to sexual purity, brotherly love, and orderly living; to correct their erroneous views of the Lord's return; to reassure them about God's deliverance from the Day of the Lord; and to exhort them to demonstrate outward honor to God's ministers, & as God's ministers to demonstrate inward Godliness

(purity), and complete sanctification. In summary, the Apostle Paul is basically writing in response to Timothy's favorable report. He does so to express his thankfulness; to encourage them on to a mature faith; to comfort them with sound doctrine; and exhort them to complete sanctification in every sphere of christian living (despite pressures & persecution).

OUTLINE

The first epistle to the Thessalonians may be outlined as follows:

(Personal and Historical - 1:2-3:13))

I. THE FRUIT OF TRUE SALVATION (1:1-10)
II. THE GENUINENESS OF TRUE MINISTRY (2:1-12)
III. THE REACTIONS TO TRUE GOSPEL (2:13-20)
IV. THE RESULTS OF TRUE FAITH (3:1-13)

(Practical and Hortatory - 4:1-5:24)

V. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TRUE CONVERTS (4:1-12)
VI. THE RAPTURE OF TRUE SAINTS (4:13-18)
VII. THE REASSURANCE OF TRUE DELIVERANCE (5:1-11)
VIII. THE REQUIREMENTS OF TRUE SANCTIFICATION (5:12-24)
A. Outward (external) honor to others (5:12-15)
B. Inward (internal) purity of ones-self (5:16-21)
C. Upward faithfulness by God (5:23-24)

IX. THE RECIPROCALITY OF TRUE LOVE (5:25-28)

I Thessalonians 5:22 is situated in the major section describing the requirements of true sanctification (5:12-24), and more specifically in the unit of thought which commands an inward purity of ones-self (5:16-22).

IMMEDIATE PRECEDING CONTEXT

The unit of thought appears to begin with 5:16 because:

1. There is a division here is the third edition of the Aland greek N.T.

2.Paul shifts from a unit of thought describing the believers external (outward) treatment of others (5:12-15) to a unit exhorting believers to internal (inward) purity of self (5;16-22)

3.Paul moves from imperatives that are transitive (followed by objects) to imperatives that are intransitively used.

4.Paul moves from a unit that deals exclusively with actions of the believer, to a unit that primarily deals with the attitude of the believer.

5.Verses 12-15 are commands related to one general theme (ones relationship with others in the assembly) while verses 16-22 are generally scattered interjected, independent commands relating to a variety of personal areas. (Note however: In context, verses 20-22 appear to be related in subject matter)

6.The imperatives in verses 12-15 are drawn out, explained, & modified, while the imperatives of verses 16-22 are short, brief, abrupt hortatory commands.
7.Verses 12-15 each begin the verse with the verbs (primarily imperatives) placed first in the sentence (Greek word order), while Paul in verses 16-22 places the adverbial & adjectival predicates first in the sentences (Greek word order) placing a deliberate emphasis not on the verb, but on the verbal modifiers & objects. (Lit.- "always rejoice (v.16); unceasingly pray (v.17); in every thing give thanks (v.18);...The Spirit do not quench (v.19); prophecies do not despise (v.20); all things prove, the good hold fast (v.21); from every form of evil abstain (v.22).

In verse 16 Paul implores the Thessalonians to an attitude of continual rejoicing. In verse 17 the command is toward an unceasing prayer life. In verse 18 believers are exhorted to have all inclusive impartial thanksgiving, based on the fact that this is God's will for the believer. In verse 19 God's command is to not quench (put out) the Holy Spirit's working. In verse 20 the spoken revelations of God ("prophecies") are not to be despised (down graded or considered as nothing). However to balance out this command, verse 21 exhorts the believer to continually prove (then approve) all things (prophesies) by testing, and having done so to hold on to (or take possession of) that which is good (Biblical).

IMMEDIATE FOLLOWING CONTEXT

Verse 23 most clearly appears to indicate a break in thought as evident in:

1.The paragraph division of the 3rd. edition of the Aland Greek N.T.
2.The adversative particle ( ) which appears to be functioning disjunctively, indicating a transition in thought (Gingrich).
3.The change in grammatical structure (shift from imperative verbs to the optative) reflects a break in the unit of thought.
4.The shift is subjects (from "you" -2p.pl. to "God Himself"

3p.pl.) also indicates a transition in thought.

The verse under consideration (5:22) appears to be the end of the unit of thought, leaving no immediate following context that is related to the section 5:16-22.

INTERNAL CONNECTION

Verse 22 appears to be a complete sentence, with one clause. The sentence has one verb (present, middle, imperative) functioning intransitively. The imperative is predicated with a prepositional phrase.

1.The clause in verse 22 seems to be directly tied (related) to the preceding clause (last half) of verse 21.
a."Good" ( )(v.21) is in contrast to "evil" ( ) (v.22).
b."Hold fast" ( )(v.21) is in contrast to "abstain" ( )(v.22) Note: Both verbs are a prepositional prefixed form of the root _____.

2.Both clauses (v.21b & 22) appear to be directly tied (related) to the preceding command ("prove all things"), which seems to be an elaboration of the command in verse 20 ("despise not prophecies").
a.The two clauses (v.21b & 22) give the expected resultant action after the believer has "proven all things" as evidenced by the related subject matter ("prophecies") in view.
b.The clause "prove all things" gives the expected opposite action of "despising prophecies" (v.20) as evidenced by the adversative particle ____.