

September
New Testament (2020 study)
(Comments based on ESV text)

September 1 — Ephesians 6 — **Obedience.** Paul finished this letter with the subject of obedience. Children are to obey their parents because it is right (v. 1) and bondservants are to obey their masters sincerely (v. 5). And since fathers and masters are in positions of authority, they are reminded that they are under the authority of their heavenly Master (v. 9) and must obey Him. Paul then followed with a paragraph of imperative forms that all of us are to obey in our defense against the threats of evil and in our ministry to others: *“Be strong ... Put on ... take up ... fasten on ... put on ... take up ... take ... keep alert”* (vv. 10-19). In a sense, children and bondservants are forced to obey but adult believers must make themselves obey God. Here is a question we should ask ourselves every time we read one of these chapters in God’s Word: Is there a command to obey? Then, force yourself to do it.

September 2 — Philippians 1 — **Praying for Love.** Paul founded the first European church, at Philippi, during his second missionary journey (Acts 16). It began at a riverside prayer meeting with a small group of Jewish women but it became a strong and loving church, the only one Paul allowed to provide financial support for his ministry. Paul visited them at least once after that beginning but was now writing to them from his imprisonment in Rome. It is a letter of encouragement and challenge that focuses on Christ, who is named 18 times in the first chapter. It also shows Paul’s strong and intimate relationship with these people. He prayed for them often (v. 3). One subject of his prayer was *“that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment”* (v. 9). It would be good to memorize that expression and use those words often when praying for your family and friends. The resulting benefits are great, too, developing the ability to *“approve what is excellent ... be pure and blameless ... filled with the fruit of righteousness”* (vv. 10-11).

September 3 — Philippians 2 — **Being Humble.** Whereas Jesus was seen in the previous chapter as being our example of love, in this chapter He is our example of humility. Notice several actions involved in Jesus’ humility: He took the form of a servant (v. 7), He *“humbled himself”* (v. 8), and He obeyed His Father even *“to the point of death”* (v. 8). We are not naturally humble; we need to take intentional steps to humble ourselves. Two of those steps are to *“count others more significant than yourselves”* (v. 3) and to *“look ... to the interests of others”* (v. 4). Timothy was also a good example of this. Paul said that he had *“no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare”* (v. 20). God the Father will ultimately demonstrate His pleasure with Jesus’ humility by having *“every knee ... bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”* (vv. 10-11). Jesus promised that *“whoever humbles himself will be exalted”* (Matt. 23:12). Being exalted should not be our motive for humbling ourselves but it will come in God’s timing as a benefit.

September 6 — Philippians 3 — **Godly Example.** Jesus was presented as our supreme example of love and humility in the first two chapters of Philippians but in this chapter, Paul challenges believers to follow his own example: *“Brothers, join in imitating me ... the example you have in us”* (v. 17). What was his example? Part of it was that he recognized the true value of things: *“I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ ...”* (v. 8). Is anything more important to you than your relationship with Christ? Your time? money? people relationships? goals? entertainment? daydreams? Another example was his focus on spiritual growth: *“I press on [:12] ... straining forward to what lies ahead [:13] ... press on toward the goal [:14] ... hold true to what we have attained [:16].”* Reading through the New Testament is evidence that you are interested in growing. Paul’s third example was that he anticipated heaven: *“we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (v. 20). We need to be thinking more about heaven today and to be getting ready for it.

September 7 — Philippians 4 — **Having Peace.** We live in political turmoil these days. Half of the people always seem to be upset about the ideas of the other half. The standoff between Euodia and

Syntyche at Philippi showed a similar kind of tension (v. 2). Paul urged everyone, “*do not be anxious about anything*” (v. 5). How can we be peaceful instead? Two solutions are given here. First, we can gain peace through prayer. “*In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God*” (v. 6). The peaceful result follows immediately: “*And the peace of God ... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” (v. 7). When you feel tension or anxiety, pray about it! Secondly, Paul said that we can gain peace in two ways, first through meditating on positive things: “*whatever is true ... honorable ... just ... pure ... lovely ... commendable ... excellence ... worthy of praise*” (v. 8). They were also told to put into practice what they had “*learned and received and heard and seen*” (v. 9) in Paul. The result of that thinking-practicing activity follows immediately: “*... and the God of peace will be with you*” (v. 9). Let’s be at peace today through praying, thinking, and practicing godliness.

September 8 — Colossians 1 — **Wide Influence.** During Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus, many other places throughout the Roman province of Asia (modern SW Turkey) were evangelized through his influence. One such place was the small city of Colossae about 100 miles east of Ephesus. It appears that the church there was started not by Paul but by one of his converts, Epaphras from Colossae (v. 7). Epaphras, now a prisoner with Paul in Rome (Philemon 1:23), informed him about the people and problems in Colossae. We may never know the outcome of our faithfulness in sharing Christ with others. Like Epaphras, someone we bring to Christ may be used to lead many others into the faith. We could have many spiritual grandchildren we will never meet—until heaven.

September 9 — Colossians 2 — **Warnings about Deviations.** Four times in this chapter Paul warned believers about the danger of being sidetracked from their faith: “*... that no one may delude you*” (v. 4), “*... that no one takes you captive*” (v. 8), “*let no one pass judgment on you*” (v. 16), and “*Let no one disqualify you*” (v. 18). What were these deviations? They included “*plausible arguments*” (v. 3), “*philosophy and ... human tradition*” (v. 8), what food to eat or days to celebrate (v. 16), withdrawing in asceticism (v. 18), and restricting what you “*handle ... taste ... [and] touch*” (v. 21). When we get sidetracked, we go off-center. This is the center: “[A]s you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (vv. 6-7). Since the center is Jesus, let us focus on Him.

September 10 — Colossians 3 — **Changing Clothes.** In this chapter, Paul pictures our taking off dirty clothes and putting on clean ones. Our spiritually dirty clothes need to be “*put away* [:8] ... [and] *put off* [:9].” Paul lists eleven kinds of sinful dirt on these clothes, things like “*immorality ... covetousness* [:5] ... *anger* ... [and] *obscene talk*” [:8]. Although God will help us, this is not His responsibility; it is ours. Take it off! In their place, spiritually clean clothes are to be put on, things like “*kindness, humility* [:12] ... *forgiving* [:13] ... [and] *love* [:14].” These, too, are our responsibility. We can work at it by obeying commands like, “*Set your minds on things that are above*” (v. 2) and “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*” (v. 16). There, doesn’t that change-of-clothes make you feel better? Although sin may give temporary pleasure, only godly living provides lasting satisfaction.

September 13 — Colossians 4 — **Networking.** It is always interesting to read the last portion of Paul’s letters. They reveal the vast network of people who were Christian friends and fellow workers with Paul. He named eleven of them in this chapter (vv. 7-17). Tychicus and Onesimus were delivering this letter. Aristarchus, Epaphras, and perhaps Jesus (Justus) were imprisoned with Paul. Demas (who would later become unfaithful—2 Tim. 4:10), Mark, and faithful Luke were working with Paul. Nympha and Archippus were people in Colossae Paul had probably not met but had heard about from Epaphras and Onesimus. Paul networked with these people partly through letters. He had also written a letter to the church at Laodicea (v. 16) that has been lost. We, as well, need to keep in contact with people who are separated from us. Pray for them when you think of them or see

them on social media. Write them a note to let them know that you love them and are praying for them.

September 14 — 1 Thessalonians 1 — **Fragile Faith.** This was an early letter written by Paul soon after he had brought the gospel to this capital of the Roman province of Macedonia on his second missionary journey. He had been there for as little as three weeks (Acts 17:2) before being forced to leave, going to Berea, and then to Athens in the province of Achaia. While in Athens, he sent Timothy and Silas (Silvanus) back to Thessalonica to check on them. By the time they returned, Paul had gone to Corinth. Their news included some questions from the Thessalonian Christians, who although their faith had already become famous (1 Thess. 1:7-8), were concerned about some believers who had died before the expected return of Christ. Would they miss heaven? Much of this letter is in answer to that question. Almost 2,000 years later we are still awaiting Christ's return but we don't question its certainty, partly because of this letter.

September 15 — 1 Thessalonians 2 — **Parenting Believers.** Paul's whirlwind stay at Thessalonica was not superficial but intense and personal. He was to them, "*like a nursing mother taking care of her own children*" (v. 7). They needed to be fed, which he did by sharing the gospel and spending concentrated time with them (v. 8). But Paul also acted, "*like a father with his children*" (v. 11) as he "*exhorted ... encouraged ... and charged*" (v. 12) them to be obedient and faithful. In addition to being fed, they needed to be challenged and directed. That parenting role was also given to the pastors at your church to help you grow. The same role is given to us parents as we feed, guide, and correct our own children toward following the Lord. We also must assume that role toward anyone the Lord enables us to bring to Him. Spiritual parenting is a huge part of helping the Kingdom of God grow.

September 16 — 1 Thessalonians 3 — **Now We Live.** Paul's tender heart is exposed in this chapter. He was unwillingly torn away from Thessalonica after just a short time of leading people to Christ and seeing them begin the Christian life. His fervent concern for their spiritual well-being is expressed twice and because of their separation, he "*could bear it no longer*" (vv. 1, 5). He had to find out how they were doing, so he sent Timothy back to them. The news was good—they were being steadfast in their faith and love (v. 6). What a huge relief that was to Paul! He exclaimed, "*now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord*" (v. 8). Do you have that kind of concern for someone you love who lives far away? Today, it is so much easier to find out. We can send an email or text or ask how they are doing through a social media message or a phone call. Keep in touch!

September 17 — 1 Thessalonians 4 — **More and More.** Even Christians who are living in obedience to God need to grow. Twice in this chapter, Paul told the Thessalonians that although they were doing great, they ought to do so "*more and more.*" They were walking so as to please God, yet they were to "*do so more and more*" (v. 1). There are always things we omit in our obedience to God and things that we have not been doing wholeheartedly. Secondly, although these believers had learned how to love many others throughout their province of Macedonia, Paul challenged them: "*We urge you, brothers, to do this more and more*" (v. 10). We can always love better—in frequency, consistency, genuineness, and without respect to the color of others' skin or how "loveable" they seem to be. Make it your aim today to please God more and to love others better.

September 20 — 1 Thessalonians 5 — **Admonishing.** No one likes to be corrected but it is sometimes necessary. Twice in this chapter, Paul used a word normally translated "admonish." In v. 12, he instructs us to "*respect those who ... are over you in the Lord and admonish you.*" They would correspond to the pastors in our churches today. Paul had to command us to "respect" them because it is "unnatural" for us to react positively to someone who corrects us or urges us to change our ways. But we need to "*esteem them very highly in love because of their work*" (v. 13). It is their God-given job. The same word is used for the second time in the next verse but the shoe is on the other foot—

we are the ones doing the admonishing: “*We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle [or ‘unruly’]*” (v. 14). When we have to correct a fellow believer, we get a feel for how hard it is for our pastors to do it the way it should be done, with love and care. It takes humility and grace to give and to receive admonition.

September 21 — 2 Thessalonians 1 — **Affliction**. This letter was written by Paul, probably also from Corinth, not long after his first letter to the Thessalonians. Both letters have much to say about Jesus’ expected return to earth. Opposition to the gospel message in Thessalonica was particularly severe. Paul had to flee the city after his short stay there and the persecution seems to have continued for those believers because Paul mentioned, “... *all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring*” (v. 4). Paul assured them that those who were afflicting them would ultimately be afflicted at Christ’s return: “*God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you*” (v. 6). In the meantime, believers might have to suffer affliction until Jesus returned, at which time He will “*grant relief to you*” (v. 7). God does not promise a trouble-free life for believers until He returns to collect His Church.

September 22 — 2 Thessalonians 2 — **Grateful and Faithful**. Paul said that the day of “*the coming of our Lord ... and our being gathered together to him*” (v. 1) will not happen until “*the rebellion*” occurs, led by “*the man of lawlessness*” (v. 3). What should we do in the meantime? First, Paul said we should thank God for two things: that “*God chose you*” (v. 13) and that “*he called you*” (v. 14). Being chosen and placed into the family of God is priceless. The second thing we should do is to be faithful: “*stand firm and hold to the traditions ... taught by us*” (v. 15). Thanking God and being faithful are particularly important when circumstances are hard. “When life is gray, pray!” May “grateful and faithful” be our life motto and epitaph.

September 23 — 2 Thessalonians 3 — **Idleness**. Paul comes down hard on lazy people in this final chapter. They were “*walking in idleness*” (v. 6) and had become “*busybodies*” instead (v. 11). That reminds me of the old expression, “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop,” a quote by Isaac Watts (b. 1674) perhaps having originated in “The Canterbury Tales” by Chaucer (b. 1342). Instead of being idle, Paul exhorts them “*to do their work quietly and to earn their own living*” (v. 12). I love his firm solution for dealing with lazy people: “*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*” (v. 10). That would solve many problems today where people are living off family or government when they are capable of earning their own living. Let us keep active today, setting an example for others who may need motivation.

September 24 — 1 Timothy 1 — **Pocket Praise**. We move now from two of Paul’s first letters (Thessalonians) to two of his last letters to Timothy and Titus. First Timothy was apparently written after Paul’s first two-year imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30) and before his final imprisonment there. In this first chapter, Paul gives a brief, but powerful example, of praise: “*To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen*” (v. 17). Sometimes we just want to give praise to God. What should we say? Here is a very good example. Write it out and put it in your pocket or purse so you can pull it out and read it to your heavenly Father occasionally. Better yet, memorize it, so it is always available to you—in your bed or car or shower. As an aid to memorizing it, I noticed an alphabetical sequence of ascending order, M-N-O, followed by descending order, H-G-F-E-A. Try it this way: “*To the King of the ages, iMmortal, iNvisible, the Only God, be Honor and Glory Forever and Ever. Amen.” Make this a focus of praise to God today, this week, this year.*

September 27 — 1 Timothy 2 — **Controversy**. There is teaching in this chapter that might rub some of us the wrong way. I would just caution you to remember that this is the Word of God, not just a letter written by a man a long time ago in a different culture. When we read something in the Bible that we don’t like, our tendency is to either dismiss it or to find a way to explain it so it will fit into our

own category of thinking or eliminate us from having to obey it. Be honest! Paul's opening instruction in this chapter about the need for prayer, however, is not controversial. He uses four different words to express its different aspects: "*supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings*" (v. 1). Pray for your government leaders today, even if they are on the other side of your political fence. It is for our benefit: "... *that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life*" (v. 2).

September 28 — 1 Timothy 3 — **How to Behave.** Timothy was a leader of church leaders. He was Paul's representative to the church in Ephesus and its surrounding churches. In this chapter, Paul gave him a detailed list of the qualifications for the offices of overseer and deacon in the churches. His reason? So that, "*you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God*" (v. 15). These qualifications acknowledge a continuum of Christian maturity in the church. Paul is saying, "Pick your leaders from the best of the best." How about the rest of us? Can we relax and not be that concerned about maturity? No, we should treat those listed qualifications as standards toward which all of us ought to be moving. This is how every believer "*ought to behave.*"

September 29 — 1 Timothy 4 — **Removing Criticism.** When Timothy was a young man, Paul presented a strange challenge to him: "*Let no one despise you for your youth*" (v. 12). Don't let them? How does one go about stopping the criticism of others? Should we just tell them to stop it? That would probably give them more ammunition against us. No, Paul told Timothy that the way to remove criticism is to "*set ... an example*" (v. 12) of doing what is right. That is not a one-time effort but a continuing endeavor: "*Practice these things, immerse yourself in them*" (v. 15). The stated reason for this effort is not just to be better but also "*so that all may see your progress*" (v. 15). They will see what you have gained and also how you are growing.

September 30 — 1 Timothy 5 — **Proper Care.** In this chapter, Paul's concentration is on the church's responsibility to provide financial care for two groups of people: widows and elders. Support is needed for the elders (or pastors) because "*The laborer deserves his wages*" (v. 18) and aid is required for the widows because they are "*truly widows*" (v. 3) without any other means of support. There was one statement about widows that particularly struck me, which applies just as well to all of us: "... *she who is self-indulgent* [*'lives for pleasure'*—NIV] *is dead even while she lives*" (v. 6). By giving in to self-indulgence, the intention is to satisfy one's emotional and physical nature but its ultimate result is to deteriorate one's spiritual well-being. So, not only should the church focus on the proper care of widows and elders but all believers should concentrate on taking care of their own personal spiritual welfare.