***1:4 What does the word "election" refer to here?***

Throughout the New Testament *election* refers to God's choice of a people in Christ for Himself; people who have put their faith in Jesus for their salvation. It refers to the church as a divinely ordained spiritual institution, and pertains to every person – Jews and Gentiles alike – who conform to God's plan of redemption (CP Lu 18:7; Ro 11:5-7, 28; Col 3:12; 1Pe 1:1-5; 2Pe 1:10-11; 2Jn 1, 3). Election is primarily corporate – it embraces individuals only in association and identification with Christ and His church (CP Ro 3:21-26; Eph 1:3-13; 2:4-10; 3:1-12; 2Th 2:13-14; Tit 1:1-3; 2:11-14; He 2:9-13; 1Pe 2:3-9; 5:13). See also comments on Mt 11:28-30, 13:10-11, 20:16, Jn 3:36, 6:37, 12:37-40, Ac 13:48, 28:23-29, Ro 9:10-13, 9:14-18, 11:4, 11:7-10, 2Ti 1:8-9.

***1:10 What do we learn from what Paul says here?***

We learn from this that the church will be taken up to heaven before the Tribulation (CP Lu 21:36; Ro 5:9-10; 1Th 5:6-11; Rev 3:7-11). The Tribulation is God's wrath poured out upon sinners, not saints (CP Ro 2:1-9; Eph 5:5-7; Col 3:5-7; 1Th 2:14-16; 5:1-5; 2Th 2:1-5, 10-12; Rev 6:12-17). All the saints of God, Old Testament and New Testament alike, both living and dead, will be with Jesus in heaven when God's wrath is poured out upon the ungodly in the earth in the Tribulation (CP Jn 14:1-3; 1Cor 15:51-58; 1Th 4:13-18; 2Th 2:6-9; Rev 3:7-13). See also comments on Lu 21:36, Jn 14:1-3; 1Cor 15:51-58, Php 3:20-21; 1Th 3:13, 4:13-18, 5:1-11; 2Th 2:1-3, 2:6-8; Rev 1:19, 3:7-13, and author's study *The Rapture* in his book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith.**

***2:14-15 Why blame the Jews and not the Romans for killing Jesus?***

Although the Jews did not physically kill Jesus, they instigated His death. They told the Roman governor Pontius Pilate to crucify Him, and he did (CP Mt 27:15-26; Lu 23:13-26; Jn 19:13-18). Even though the Jews did not physically kill Jesus, God held them culpable. Their sin was the greater – for rejecting Jesus and delivering Him up to death (CP Jn 19:11; Ac 2:22-23, 36; 4:10). It was always in God's plan that Jesus would die – He was God's redeeming sacrifice for mankind's sins (CP Gen 3:15; Isa 42:1-7; 53:4-12 with Jn 1:29-31; 1Pe 1:18-21; Rev 5:6-10). Even though Christ's death was ordained by God, it does not absolve either the Jews or Romans from guilt. (See also comments on Mt 27:24-25, Lu 23:13-26, Jn 19:11, Ac 2:22-23.)

***2:18 How did Satan hinder Paul from returning to Thessalonica?***

While Paul does not specify how Satan hindered him from returning to Thessalonica it can only be assumed that it tied in with the sufferings he described in 2 Cor 11 (CP 2Cor 11:23-27 with Ac 16:22-24 and 21:30-28:31; 1Cor 15:31 with 2Cor 4:11-12; Ac 14:19-20 with Ga 4:13-14; Ac 27:41-44 (this is the only recorded shipwreck Paul suffered)). The other events described in 2Cor 11:23-27 are not recorded in scripture. Most of Paul's sufferings were the outworkings of the demon – the messenger of Satan, Paul's "thorn in the flesh" – given to Paul to buffet him after he had been taken up to heaven for a time of learning with Jesus (CP 2Cor 12:1-10). See also comments on 2Cor 12:7 and Ga 4:13-16, and author's study *Paul the Apostle – a Chosen Vessel unto God* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 2)**.

***2:19-20 What do we learn from what Paul says here?***

That the Thessalonian Christians will be Paul's *crown of rejoicing* before the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming, is a sure indication that believers will all recognize each other in heaven.

***3:12 How is increased and abounding love exemplified in Christians?***

Most Christians love each other with a mutual friendly love which is called out of their hearts because they find pleasure in each other's fellowship, but God calls us to increase that love to an unconditional self-sacrificial love – the same love wherewith He loves us (CP Eph 5:1-2; Php 1:9; 1Th 4:9-10; 2Pe 1:5-8). When our love for each other becomes the deciding factor in our choices and the motivating power in our actions, we will be exemplifying in our lives the same self-sacrificial love for each other as Christ's was for us (CP 2Th 1:3 with Jn 13:34-35; 1Cor 13:1-7; Ga 5:22). God also calls Christians to not only increase and abound in love for those who belong to the household of faith, but to all men (CP Mt 5:43-46; 19:19; Lu 6:27, 31-32, 35 with Lu 10:25-37). See also comments on Jn 13:34-35, Ro 13:8, 1Cor 12:31, Ga 5:1-8, 5:13, 1Jn 2:7, 3:15, 3:16-18, 3:19-22, 4:7-21, Rev 3:7-13, and author's study *How Christians are to Love One Another* in his book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith.**

***3:13 Which coming of Christ is Paul referring to here?***

Paul is referring to the time when Jesus comes again to take all the saints of God - both living and dead - back to heaven with Him at the first resurrection (CP 1:10; 2:19; Php 3:20-21; Col 3:4 with Jn 5:28-29; 14:1-3; 1Cor 15:51-58; 1Th 4:13-18). See also comments on Jn 5:28-29, 14:1-3, 1Cor 15:51-58, Php 3:20-21, 1Th 1:10, 4:13-18, 2Th 2:1-3, 2:6-8, Rev 1:19, 3:7-13, and author's study *The Rapture* in his book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith.**

***4:4 What does the word "vessel" (KJV) refer to here?***

The word *vessel* (KJV) here refers to one of two things: to man's own body which he is to keep from fornication (CP V3-7 with 2Cor 4:7 and 2Ti 2:21). *Vessel* can also refer to a wife, whom a man is privileged to "possess" in a marriage relationship (CP 1Pe 3:7). The first view is preferred because the preceding verse in 1Th 4 warns against fornication, and the succeeding verses warn against evil desire and lust, and committing adultery with a fellow-Christian's wife (CP V3-7).

***4:9-10 See comments on 1Th 3:12***

***4:13-18 What do we learn from what Paul says here?***

Paul is describing the fact and manner of the first resurrection here, when Christ comes again to take all the saints of God - Old Testament and New Testament alike, both living and dead – back to heaven with Him (CP Jn 5:28-29; 14:1-3; 1Cor 15:51-58; Php 3:20-21; 2Th 2:7). The events that take place in these scriptures all signify the end of the church age. 1Th 4:17 describes what is commonly referred to by Christians as the "rapture" of the church. *Caught up* is from the Greek work **harpazo** whose equivalent Latin word is **raptus**, from which the word *rapture* is derived. *Rapture* defines a state of being caught up or carried away with joy, love, ecstasy. What other word could better portray the way the church, *... we which are alive,* will be transported to heaven with Jesus (CP V17).

Every born again believer knows something about the rapture but not too many fully understand it. Generally it is because they confuse the scriptures referring to the rapture with the scriptures referring to Christ's second coming. They are two distinct and separate events in time and we really need to be able to distinguish between the scriptures concerning them (CP Isa 63:1-6, Dan 2:44-45; 7:13-14, 18, 27; Joel 3:1-21; Zech 14:1-5, 9, 16-21; Mt 24:27-44; 25:31; Mk 13:24-27; Lu 21:25-28; 2Th 1:7-10; He 9:28; 10:25; Jude 14-15; Rev 1:7; 19:11-21). All those scriptures concern the second coming of Christ, not the rapture. They relate to the Antichrist, the Great Tribulation, the battle of Armageddon, the Judgement of the Nations and the setting up of the millennial kingdom, etc. This is when Christ comes back to earth **with** His saints. The rapture is when Christ comes in the air, **for** the saints, to take them to heaven. There will be at least seven years between this event and His second coming. We will study all the scriptures concerning the rapture shortly but first turn to Lu 21:25-26, 36. Jesus alludes to the rapture here in Verse 36. It is the first reference to the rapture in scripture. Jesus tells His listeners that there is a way to escape the horrendous events of the Great Tribulation He was describing in V25-26, and that is to be accounted worthy to escape them. The only way to escape them though is to be removed from the earth beforehand, because they will affect everyone on earth. This also proves the rapture will precede the Tribulation (CP Jn 14:1-3).

Here we get a clearer picture of how the church is going to be taken out of the way of the Great Tribulation, and if there was no other proof in scripture the promise of Jesus here alone would suffice. We can be secure in the knowledge that as surely as Jesus went to heaven so will He return for His own to take them there too (CP Jn 14:19). Jesus said, "Because I live ye shall live also." We live, not in anticipation of physical death as unbelievers do, but in anticipation of Jesus coming again for us, and whether we be living or dead at that time we shall rise together with Him in glory. This is assured because Jesus has already risen and ascended to heaven and that is why His resurrection is so important to believers – not only does it guarantee the future resurrection and ascension of those who have died in Christ and are in the grave, it also guarantees the rapture of those still living at that time. The ultimate purpose of the Lord coming back for His saints is so they will be with Him in all eternity, and taking them to heaven is simply the first step in His purpose (CP 1Cor15:12-23, 32, 42-44, 50-58; 1Th 4:13-18). If there is no rapture these scriptures are meaningless, but they are not meaningless at all. They clearly express God's eternal purpose and plan for His saints and are unassailable proof of the fact and the manner of the rapture for those who dismiss the rapture as a fallacy of fundamentalism. We learn from these scriptures that the spirits and the souls of all the dead saints will be brought back from heaven to be united to their resurrected bodies. Their corruptible bodies will rise up from the grave and put on incorruption while the mortal bodies of the saints still living at that time will put on immortality. Then we will all meet up together in the clouds before going to the place Jesus has prepared for us in heaven as He promised in Jn 14:1-3. 1Cor 15:51-58 is the first clear reference in scripture to the rapture (CP Php 3:11-12, 20-21).

This is another clear promise of the rapture. The word *conversation* in V20 means citizenship. This teaches us that our citizenship is in heaven from whence we look for Jesus to come and take us unto Himself. Paul reaffirms here what he told the Corinthian church, that when Jesus comes He will change our natural bodies to spiritual, from mortal to immortal, from corruption to incorruption and from weakness and humiliation to glory and power. We also learn here that our new transformed bodies will be flesh and bone like Christ's body of glory which He showed to the disciples before He ascended to heaven (CP Lu 24:36-43). The church and all the saints of God will go up to be with Jesus - Old Testament and New Testament saints alike - right back from Abel onwards. This even includes Rahab the harlot (CP Josh 2:1-3, 6:17-25; He 11:31; Jas 2:24-25). Christ died to redeem the Old Testament saints too. They looked forward to the cross and its salvation benefits in faith, as we look back to it in faith. We are all one in Christ now (CP Ro 3:23-26; He 9:13-15; 11:4-5, 7-10, 13-16, 39-40).

The rapture of the church, the raising of the dead saints and all the saints that come out of the Tribulation, including God's two witnesses who were killed in Rev 11, until the second coming of Christ all form part of what the Bible calls the first resurrection (CP Dan 12:2; Lu 14:13-14; 20:34-38; Jn 5:28-29; Ac 24:14-15; He 11:35; Rev 11:3-12; 14:9-13; 20:4-6). There will be two resurrections of the dead. The first resurrection is to eternal life for the righteous dead, who will be judged at the Judgement Seat of Christ and the second resurrection - over 1,000 years later - is to eternal damnation for the wicked dead. They will be judged and consigned to hell at the Great White Throne Judgement (CP 2Cor 5:10; Rev 20:4-6, 11-15). The rapture is the blessed hope of the church. The church has been waiting for it to happen since Paul's day. Paul knew the rapture could have happened in his lifetime, and he communicated that anticipation to the Thessalonian church (CP 1Th 4:13-18). We likewise are to be in eager anticipation of it and communicate it to others also (CP Ro 13:11-14; 1Cor 10:1-12; 2Cor 5:1-4; Php 4:5; Tit 2:11-15). The rapture is a purifying hope - the source of inspiration and consecration for all sincere Christians, and a comfort to those being persecuted for Jesus' sake (CP Eph 5:25-27;

Col 3:1-6; 1Th 3:12-13; 5:23; 2Th 3:5; Jas 5:7-9; 1Pe 5:4; 1Jn 2:28; 3:1-3; Jude 24).

The first intimation we have of the rapture is when Jesus alluded to it in Lu 21:36, and as indirect a reference as it is, nonetheless it teaches us that there is a way to escape the Great Tribulation and that is to be accounted worthy. The more scriptures we study the more we see the church as being accounted worthy through the Blood of Christ (CP Ro 5:8-10). The church is not going to go through the Tribulation. The Tribulation is God's wrath poured out upon sinners, not saints (CP Eph 5:1-7). Paul is talking to the Christian church here. This admonition is for us also. It teaches that only those walking in the light as God is in the light will be taken up in the rapture. Those of us who do not remain faithful to the salvation benefits wrought out for us by Christ on the Cross of Calvary will have the wrath of God poured out upon them the same as unbelievers. They will go through the Tribulation with the unbelievers (CP 1Th 1:6, 9-10). This makes it clear that truly faithful believers are not appointed to go through the Tribulation, and that they can know they will be taken out of the way when Jesus returns for His saints. This is also what Jesus promised the Philadelphia church in Rev 3:7-13 (CP 1Th 5:1-11). This teaches us that the Day of the Lord, designated by the Tribulation will not overtake us like a thief in the night because we are not the children of darkness, who it will overtake, but the children of Light, and we are not appointed to go through the Tribulation. Again we see that God's wrath is to be poured out upon sinners, not saints. This is further proof for those who are not sure that the rapture will precede the Great Tribulation, however we must all comply with the conditions of V6-8 to qualify for the rapture.

We are not to sleep, but watch and be sober. That means we are to be spiritually prepared. We are to live soberly and righteously and not get drunk. We are to live as the children of the day, not as the children of the night. The word *sober* here has two meanings – one is literal and refers to abstaining from strong drink. The other is metaphorical and means alertness, wakefulness, self-control. We are to be alert spiritually and self-controlled just as someone who does not touch strong drink. Paul used both meanings in this passage. We are also called to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life (CP Mt 25:1-13). We cannot be indifferent and careless like the five virgins in this passage who went to sleep with no oil in their lamps but rather we are to be like the servants who when their lord returned were waiting to open the door to him (CP Lu 12:35-48). Verses 45-48 carry a grim warning for professing Christians who fail to abstain from evil and are unfaithful to Christ. They will be left behind at the rapture. Once more we learn that only those who comply with the conditions will qualify for the rapture (CP Rev 2:1-3:22).

Of the seven churches Jesus addressed here He promises to keep one only from the hour of trial – the Great Tribulation – and that is the church of Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13). Jesus confirms here what Paul told the Thessalonians in 1Th 1:10. They were the only ones who remained faithful to His word and did not surrender to their circumstances. This also is further proof of a pre-Tribulation rapture. Rev 3:11 refers to the rapture but it highlights another important teaching too: while those seven churches were actual churches in the cities mentioned at the time of John's revelation, they are also representative of all churches in all ages from then until the rapture ends the church age. The letters to the churches are to be interpreted as not only applying for that time but as having an ongoing application for all generations, including ours. Jesus is talking to us here too both corporately and individually and we had best examine ourselves to ensure that we belong to the Philadelphia church, otherwise we will not be going up in the rapture. *Philadelphia* means the love of brethren. Does that apply to us as a body and to each of us personally? Can we honestly say we love the brethren as Christ loves us, because God says that it is only our love of brethren that proves our love for Him. *Brethren* means every other Christian – not only those who are easy to love but those who are hard to love, too – not only those who are in China or India, but those who sit with us in church also (CP 1Pe 1:22-23; 3:8-9; 1Jn 2:9-11; 3:14-19; 4:7-21). And if we love God then we will keep His commandments. This is the only sure way we know we qualify for the rapture, because we keep God's commandments. There is no other way - we forfeit our place in His kingdom if we do not keep his commandments. God calls us liars if we say we love Him but are not totally yielded to His word (CP 1Jn 2:3-6). The relevance of Christ's messages to the seven churches of Revelation for churches today, is what they reveal about the natural trend of churches to fall into error; to accept false teaching; to tolerate immorality, idolatry and heresies; to lose their zeal for God and to adapt to the anti God elements of the world system. They are not hearing what the Spirit saith to them. But churches are people – individuals formed into a body and God holds us individually responsible for our actions. We must continually examine our beliefs and activities and ensure that they always conform to what Christ expects of His church, and to qualify ourselves for the rapture.

Now to find out the time frame for the rapture. Thus far the scriptures have established the fact and the manner of the rapture, and that it will take place before the Great Tribulation, but what is its time frame in relation to the emergence of Antichrist, because it is during his reign that the Tribulation comes upon the earth (CP Dan 7:25; 8:23-25; 9:27; 11:36-39; 12:1; Mt 24:15-22). We learn from these scriptures that the Tribulation will occupy the last 3½ years of Antichrist's seven year reign. Does this mean then that the church will still be on earth during the first 3½ years? Antichrist is a benevolent dictator during this period, not yet the enemy of God which he is to become (CP Rev 6:1-4).

At the opening of the first seal Antichrist is revealed as the rider of the white horse. A great many Christians believe that the rider on the white horse in V2 is Jesus, but that is incorrect because Jesus is opening the seals. He would not be the contents of the seals and open them as well. Furthermore Jesus is sybmolized here by a lamb, not a horseman (CP Rev 5:1-9). The opening of the first seal and the revelation of the rider on the white horse are synonymous with the first half of Daniel's seventieth week when Antichrist enters into his seven year peace treaty with Israel (CP Dan 7:7-8, 24-26; 8:8-10,20-25; 11:35-45). The rider on the white horse in Rev 6:2 symbolizes Antichrist, who rises up at the start of Daniel's seventieth week - Antichrist rises to power as the eleventh king among the ten kings through the

empowering of Satan, which is what we learned in Dan 8:24-25 and 11:36-39 (CP 2Th 2:8-9; Rev 13:1-4). Antichrist is the only one prophesied to go forth "conquering and to conquer", not Christ (CP Dan 7:23-25; 8:9-14; 11:40-43). The white horse of Rev 6:2 is not to be confused with the white horse of 19:11. The horse in 6:2 is only symbolic, whereas the one in 19:11 is literal. Christ is the rider on the white horse in 19:11, but until then He is symbolized by a lamb (CP Rev 19:11-13). There are no scriptures to corroborate any teaching that Christ is symbolized by the rider on the white horse in Rev 6:2 who went forth "conquering and to conquer". Antichrist was given a crown because he had brought peace and prosperity to the earth. He has a bow but no arrows which depicts him as a benevolent dictator. We know he brought peace to the earth in V2 because in V4 he is given power to take it away. This power comes from Satan (CP Dan 7:21-22; 8:9-12, 24; 9:27; 11:40-45; Rev 12:13-17).

The opening of the second seal in Rev 6:4 signalled the onset of the Tribulation in the middle of Antichrist's reign. The opening of the second seal and the revelation of the rider on the red horse and the events that followed in Rev 6:3-4 are synonymous with the second half of Daniel's seventieth week - the time of the Great Tribulation. But where is the church during the first 3½ years after the first seal is opened? The church has not been mentioned since Rev 3:22 at the conclusion of Jesus' messages to the seven churches, and it is not mentioned again in scripture as being on earth thereafter. We need to know why (CP 2Th 2:1-12). Who is the restrainer of lawlessness here that has to be taken out of the way for Antichrist to be revealed? The Thessalonians knew who it is as V5-7 prove, so we can know it too. It is not the Holy Spirit as so many Christians believe because the Holy Spirit will still be on earth during the Great Tribulation (CP 1Cor 12:3). Nobody can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit, so He will remain on earth convicting the multitudes of their sins who get saved during the Tribulation. The *he* of 2Th 2:7 is the church. The church is never again mentioned in scripture as being on earth after Rev 3:22, and Antichrist is not revealed until Rev 6:1-2. The church is raptured in Rev 1 between "the things which are" and "the things which shall be hereafter" (CP Rev 1:19). The "things which are", are the things concerning the church up until the rapture - the things Jesus told John to write in the letters to the seven churches - and the "things that shall be hereafter" are the things that occur after the rapture which are the subject of Rev 4-22. (There is no need to read these chapters here but they do need to be read to learn what they teach.)

Chapters 4-22 in Revelation address themselves to the events that come to pass after the rapture – the emergence of Antichrist, Satan being cast down to earth from heaven, the Tribulation, Christ's second coming, the battle of Armageddon, and Christ's millennial kingdom, etc. The saints who are saved after Rev 4:1 come out of the Great Tribulation – they are not the church as we have previously learned (CP Rev 13:7, 15). Chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation record the church, now represented by the four and twenty elders, as being in heaven, which is well before Antichrist is revealed in 6:1-2 (CP Rev 4:3-4, 10-11; 5:4-5, 8-14; 19:9-14; 22:8-9). The four and twenty elders identified themselves in Rev 5:9 as the church, redeemed to God from out of every tribe, language, people, and nation in the earth (CP Rev 5:9). That is why Paul was able to assure the Thessalonian church that the Great Tribulation would not overtake them as a thief in the night – because they would already be with Jesus in heaven (read again 1Th 5:1-11). This is for our edification also. We too can comfort each other in the knowledge that not only will the saints still living when Christ comes back not go through the Tribulation, but they will be raptured to heaven before Antichrist's seven year reign even commences.

This part of our study is now complete. We have established from scripture the fact (CP 1Th 5:1-11), the manner (CP 1Th 4:13-18), and the time frame of the rapture for those who were not sure (CP 2Th 2:1-8). Praise God!

But there is a very sobering teaching comes out of this study as well, and we must ever be mindful of it (CP 2Th 2:7-13). This teaches us that after the church is taken up from the earth, salvation will no longer be available to those still living who have already heard the gospel and rejected it. They will be lost forever if they do not repent and accept Christ while the church is still here. This includes members of our immediate family and other relatives and friends whom we dearly love, as well as professing Christians not truly committed to Christ, and others who are backslidden. Show them this scripture and explain what it means: that once the church is gone from the earth salvation will only be available to those who never had an adequate opportunity to receive the knowledge of the truth or to hear and understand the gospel (CP also Mt 7:21; 12:30). If they will not listen to us we must fervently pray God to send another labourer in the gospel unto them. We must never give up on God for their salvation. We can claim Jesus' promise in Jn 15:7 but we must make sure we meet the conditions first (CP Jn 15:7). There is no time to lose – the rapture could happen at any moment in time (CP Php 3:20-21; Tit 2:13). This teaches that there are no prophecies yet to be fulfilled for the rapture to take place (CP Jn 9:4). That means we still have to preach the gospel to other lost souls as well in the meantime. See also comments on Lu 21:36, Jn 5:28-29, 14:1-3, 1Cor 15:51-58, Php 3:20-21, 1Th 5:1-11, 2Th 2:1-3, 2:6-8; 2Ti 2:18; Rev 1:19, 3:7-13, and author's study *The Rapture* in his book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith.**

***5:1-11 What does "the day of the Lord" here signify?***

The Old Testament prophets used this term to designate a future event in time that would seriously affect Israel (CP Isa 2:10-17; 13:6-16; 34:8; Jer 46:10; Eze 30:1-3; Joel 1:15-20; 2:1-11; 3:1-2, 13-16; Amos 5:18-20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7-13, 18; 2:1-3; Zech 14:1-9; Mal 4:1-6). These scriptures all fix the day of the Lord as the Great Tribulation period which is followed by the battle of Armageddon and Christ's subsequent millennial kingdom - His one thousand years reign on earth. The prediction by Isaiah in Isa 13:6, 9-10 of the darkening of the sun and moon also confirms this because that will occur during that period (CP Mt 24:29-31; Rev 6:12-17; 8:12-13). Christians need have no fear however as 1Th 5:1-11 teaches that these events will not overtake Christians like a thief in the night because they are not children of darkness, who the events will overtake, but the children of light, and they are not appointed to go

through the Tribulation, as we just learned in our study on 1Th 4:13-18. (See also comments on 1Th 4:13-18).

***5:12-13 What do we learn from what Paul says here?***

*Them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord*, *and admonish you*, refers to the elders who constitute the Presbytery, the ruling body in the New Testament church. This is but one of many scriptures in the New Testament which prove that in the divine order the New Testament church does not revolve around the ministry of one man, as is the norm in most churches today, but a plurality of men, whom God appointed to co-equally guide and instruct His people in the faith (CP Ac 14:23; 20:17, 28; Eph 4:11-16; 1Ti 3:1-7, 5:17; Tit 1:5-9; Jas 5:14; 1Pe 5:1-3). Bishop in 1 Ti 3:1-7 is simply another name for Elder. (See also comments on Ac 11:30, 20:17, Ro 11:13, 1Cor 12:28, Eph 2:20 (A), 4:11-12, Php 1:1, 1Ti 3:1-7, 5:17-18, Tit 1:5-9, 1Pe 5:1-3).

Christians are to esteem and love the Elders. They are responsible to God for the well-being of each and every Christian's soul, and Christians are to do everything to make their ministries a joy, not a burden (CP 1Th 5:12-13; 1Ti 5:17; He 13:7, 17). See also comments on He 13:8, 13:17, and author's study *The Church* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 1)**.

***5:17 What does it mean to pray without ceasing?***

To pray without ceasing does not mean that we are to abstain from everything else and be praying in unbroken continuity. It means we are to be in a constant attitude of dependence upon God and pray whenever an opportunity presents itself – do not let the opportunity go past us (CP Mt 6:7-8 with Eph 6:18 and Col 4:2-3). It also does not mean that we have to keep praying for the same thing over and over again until the answer manifests itself, as some believe that is what the scripture teaches (CP Mt 21:17-22; Mk 11:22-24; Jn 15:7; Php 4:6-7; 1Jn 5:14-15). These scriptures all teach that believers do not have to continuously pray for the same thing over and over again until the answer manifests itself. If they are abiding in Christ and His word is abiding in them, believers can confidently pray knowing that their requests will be granted (CP Lu 18:1-8).

This is the parable we know as the unjust judge and the persistent widow. This is one of the parables used to teach that when we bring a petition before God we should persist in praying for it like the widow persisted with the judge, until God answers us, like the judge answered the widow. That is not what the parable teaches at all. If it does then we are putting a just and a holy God in the same category as an unjust and an unholy judge. The parable does not compare the two, it contrasts them. The parable does not teach about prayer in general, but prayer pertaining to the Lord's second coming – intercessory prayer. It is the concluding part of a fairly long discourse by Jesus about His second coming in Luke 17. It is a call to believers to persevere in prayer against the works of the devil until Jesus comes back (CP Lu 17:20-18:8). The widow's adversary in the lawsuit before the judge is the equivalent to our adversary the devil in the earth. The parable teaches us that we are not to be passive spectators in the kingdom of God but to persist in faith and persevere in prayer for God's will to be done on earth in spite of continued opposition and rejection, which is what the unjust judge portrays in the parable. This is what Jesus means when He says that men ought always to pray and not faint. He wants us to keep praying the kingdom in and not give up, even though His second coming may not be immediate. That is why He questions whether the Christians then remaining when He does come back will still be faithfully pressing in for the things of the kingdom and persevering in prayer, as portrayed by the widow in the parable, or will they have given up hope and lost their faith. Jesus then contrasts the unwilling and uncaring judge's tardiness in vindicating the widow, to God's willingness and readiness to vindicate His children (CP Lu 11:1-10).

Here we have the Lord's prayer and the parable of the friend at midnight. This parable is also used to teach the necessity of persisting in prayer for a request to be granted but once again that is not what the parable teaches at all. In the Lord's prayer Jesus is teaching the disciples to pray, and He then illustrates for them by the parable of the friend at midnight that they can expect their prayers to be answered. The man in the parable got what he asked for because although it was midnight, he boldly and unashamedly went to his friend, knocked on his door and asked for it. In V9-10 Jesus promises that we can do the same with God. All we have to do is what the man in the parable did: ask, seek and knock. The word *importunity* in this parable means shamelessness, boldness, impudence, audacity. It does not mean persistence, as so many teach. It might be used to mean persistence in other settings, but not here, and this is the only place in the Bible where it is used. To summarise this parable, it teaches quite simply that, as the man who shamelessly dared to ask his friend got his request, so those who through prayer shamelessly ask, seek and knock will also get their requests from God (CP Mk 11:12-14, 20-24).

Notice here that Jesus only spoke to the fig tree once and it withered up and died. Then He tells us that if we have faith in God we can do the same thing. He goes on to say that all we have to do is believe that what we say or pray will come to pass, and it will (CP Php 4:6-7). We only have to make our requests known to God once, and if we have asked in faith, doubting nothing but believing we have what we ask for then we can rest assured that God has granted our request, and from then on we just keep thanking Him until the answer manifests itself (CP 1Jn 5:14-15). This teaches us that while we do not have to persist in praying for the same need over and over, we do have to persist in faith, and keep believing that God will meet our needs, and as they arise keep on petitioning Him for them, even though the answer may not immediately manifest itself (CP Nu 23:19; Psa 89:34; Isa 46:9-11). See also comments on Mt 21:17-22; Lu 18:1-8; Jn 15:7; Php 4:6-7 and 1Jn 5:14-15 and author's studies *Prayer* and *Confessing God's Word* in his book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith** and *A Daily Confession for Christians* and *Making the Impossible Possible* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 2)**.

***5:18 See comments on Eph 5:20***

***5:21 What does Paul mean here?***

Primarily Paul is admonishing Christians here to carefully test the prophecies of V20 (CP V20). Secondarily Paul is calling upon Christians not to passively accept every teaching in the church at face value. Everything must be tested in the light of scripture CP Ac 17:10-11; 2 Pe 1:16-19; 1Jn 4:1). Paul and Silas' teaching in Ac 17 was acceptable because it conformed to scripture. Any teaching that does not conform to scripture must be rejected, regardless of who teaches it. (See also comments on Ac 17:11 and 1Jn 4:1-6.

***5:26 See comments on Ro 16:16***