

Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians
(2) Paul's Thanksgiving to God

Introduction:

We will begin this morning by reading again the entire first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the church at Thessalonica.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

²We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess. 1:1-10)

Last Lord's Day we gave our attention to the opening greeting of the apostle to this church (1:1), a church that Paul had founded not too many weeks prior to writing this letter. Paul had high regard for this church, and that for several reasons. First, we read that Paul saw this church to be "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 1). God confers great value and dignity upon His people, whom He has redeemed unto Himself through Jesus Christ. And then we read, secondly, that Paul had high regard for this church because of the work of God's grace in them to which their lives bore witness. We read in verse 2 that Paul always thanked God for them, even as he prayed for them constantly. When he prayed for them, he recalled the grace of God at work in them. He would remember before God their work of faith, their labor of love, and the steadfastness of their hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's thanksgiving to God for these Christians reflects Paul's conviction that everything commendable about these Christians was due to the grace of God at work in them. This was why Paul thanked God for them. Let us consider more carefully...

I. Paul's grateful thanksgiving to God for these Christians. (1 Thess. 1:2)

Verse 2 reads, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers." This was a common prayer of the apostle for the people of God. He was always thanking God for the Christians to whom he wrote. Consider Paul's statements to other churches to which he wrote epistles. To the church at **Rome** he wrote:

First, *I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all*, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. (Rom. 1:8)

To the church at **Corinth** he wrote,

⁴*I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,* ⁵that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, ⁶even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, ⁷so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:4-8)

To the church at **Philippi** Paul wrote,

³*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,* ⁴*always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,* ⁵for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. (Phil. 1:3-7)

To the church at **Colossae** he wrote,

³*We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,* ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; ⁵because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; ⁷as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. (Col. 1:3-8)

Paul frequently stated in his epistles that he was praying constantly for the Christian readers of the churches. This should press upon each of us our great responsibility and great privilege to be praying for our church, and other churches also. God has ordained prayer as a major means by which He conducts His work in His world. If you pray not, you will have not. If you pray not for your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, they will have not. Please be faithful in prayer for me and for your church family and for the Lord's will and work to be done through us. Pray that our Lord will bless us with His protection and provision of every spiritual blessing for which we are in need, in order that we might live rightly before Him and be blessed by Him in our service for His name.

Now Paul makes a marvelous statement regarding this church: "*We give thanks to God always for all of you,* constantly mentioning you in our prayers." Why was it that Paul thanked God for them? Paul knew assuredly that *they were Christians as a result of God's powerful grace working in their lives.* God was the source and cause of their salvation, so Paul would thank God for them. He could reflect upon the beginnings of the church, which certainly confirmed to him that this was so. It was a remarkable display of the grace of God in bringing numbers to salvation in just a few short weeks of ministry in this pagan city in which Paul proclaimed the gospel. God had first led him through a vision to travel to Macedonia (cf. Acts 16:9-10). After he had established a church in Philippi, He and his ministry team passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, then arriving to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). There they found a synagogue of the Jews, and there preached the gospel to them. The church came into being because God had worked mightily through Paul transforming the lives of these people. It was fitting that Paul thanked God for them upon his every remembrance of them.

We should be no less thankful to our God for our church and our participation in it, for we too, are the product of God's miracle-working grace. No, we were not founded due to a heavenly vision. No, I suspect few of us could recount miracles in nature accompanying our conversion. Many in the early churches could do so. Nevertheless, our church is a miraculous thing, and the fact that you are a member

here as a believer in Jesus Christ is also due to the miraculous work of the grace of God in your life. We have every reason to thank God for this church as Paul had for the church at Philippi. As assuredly as the Lord had led Paul, the Lord led one of His servant(s) to speak a word to each of us when we were quite lost and far from God. He had providentially placed each of us where we heard that gospel witness. In our conversion God had rendered the god of this age--the devil, impotent to keep us in our spiritual ignorance and hardness of heart. We know that this is so from Paul's words in **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. ***For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***

God did a great miracle when He brought us to faith in Jesus Christ. It is likened to His original act of creation. God employed great creative power to bring each of us who are true Christians from spiritual death into the state of new life in Jesus Christ.

Paul could say, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers." And we, too, should thank God for each other. We are the products of God's work of grace. He alone receives the glory for what ***He has done***. And we will see to it, Lord willing, that He get the glory for all things that ***He will yet do*** among us.

Now notice also what is implied here in Paul's words: ***Paul believed prayer should be offered frequently even consistently, on behalf of God's people.*** This seems to be a rather obvious thing, does it not? But how often do people who believe in God's sovereign grace fail in the matter of prayer? You see, there is a tendency among grace people to assume,

"What will be, will be, for God has decreed all things that are to come to pass, and so why pray? Or even if we do, what does it really matter? Will we change God's decree? His plan? Of course not, that cannot be."

And so, prayer is often neglected or not viewed with the great importance that the Scriptures place upon it. This is a terrible deficiency and failure when grace people are prayerless people.

We may learn from the prophet **Daniel's example**, when we consider our effort of prayer in the light of the certain and infallible unfolding of God's decree in history. Daniel had been taken exile to Babylon in the first deportation under King Nebuchadnezzar after God had used him to judge Judah and Jerusalem. Years later he was reading Jeremiah's prophecy and read of God's purpose to bring an end of the Jewish exile and captivity and to return His people to their land at the end of seventy years. Daniel's reaction was not to pack his suitcase and wait for the inevitable word of their release. We read of how he responded in **Daniel 9:1ff**.

¹In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— ²in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that ***He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.***

³***Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.*** ⁴And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, ⁵we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. ⁶Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our

fathers and all the people of the land. ⁷O Lord, righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.

⁸“O Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. ⁹To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. ¹⁰We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets. ¹¹Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him. ¹²And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

¹³“As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. ¹⁴Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice. ¹⁵And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as it is this day—we have sinned, we have done wickedly!

¹⁶“O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us. ¹⁷Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord’s sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. ¹⁸O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. ¹⁹O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

Even though Daniel knew that time had arrived for the Lord to restore His people from the Babylonian exile, he did not leave off praying to this end. His understanding of what God was about to do motivated him to pray more fervently, even as he could then pray more intelligently.

Now some **Arminians**¹, that is, those who deny God’s sovereign grace, wrongly argue against the idea of God’s sovereignty by saying the idea renders prayer meaningless and useless. We see this is clearly a false charge, for Daniel knew God’s decree, nevertheless, it was not a disincentive to pray, but rather it stirred him greatly to pray and gave him the specific information for what he should pray. Yet some sovereign grace people, I fear, give weight to the Arminian’s charge, for they fail to pray assuming that God’s decree will occur irrespective of prayer. No, ***God has ordained the means as well as the end.*** The Bible affirms that you have not because you ask not, not because God did not decree it. We should be the most prayerful of Christians. And ***we should be the most faith-full Christians in our prayer, for we know that God will bring to pass what we ask when we ask according to His will,*** for His purposes

¹ Arminian is a term that describes those who deny the need and reality of God’s sovereign grace to save sinners. They believe that sinners are weakened by sin, but that they are not truly spiritually dead, for they have the ability to respond to God’s offer of life in the gospel of their own free will—sinners can come to Christ with God’s help, but ultimately it is due to their decision, not God’s action. Arminians deny God’s election by grace of specific sinners to salvation, for they believe that people’s election is conditioned upon their willing response to the gospel. The term Arminian originated from the teachings of James Arminius, who sought to champion these views in post reformation Europe.

and intentions cannot fail or be diverted by fallen man. Our God is sovereign. We affirm the truth of **Daniel 4:34f.**

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

And so, knowing and believing in the sovereignty of God in bringing His people to salvation should not be an impediment to prayer, for according to Scripture it is an impetus to prayer. One of our chief responsibilities as Christians is prayer. We should be as **Epaphras**, "a servant of Christ", who Paul could write to the church at Colossae that he was "*always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*" (Col. 4:1).

II. Paul's grateful remembrance of these Christians (1 Thess. 1:3)

What was it that Paul remembered every time he prayed for the Christians in this church? We read in **verse 3**, "*remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Paul commonly looked for and delighted in the presence of this triad work of God's grace. Paul had written elsewhere of these three principle graces that God gives His people. He declared in 1 Corinthians 13:13, "And now abide *faith, hope, love*, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

We read in Colossians 1 of faith, hope, and love.

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your *faith* in Christ Jesus and of your *love* for all the saints; ⁵because of the *hope* which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth. (Col. 1:3-6)

Here we have these three gifts of grace listed, but in different order: first faith, then love, and then hope. Here are the comments of **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) on these verses:

Faith, hope, and love, are the three principal graces in the Christian life, and proper matter of our prayer and thanksgiving. (1) He gives thanks for their faith in Christ Jesus, that they were brought to believe in him, and take upon them the profession of his religion, and venture their souls upon his undertaking. (2) For their love. Besides the general love which is due to all men, there is a particular love owing to the saints, or those who are of the Christian *brotherhood* (1 Pet. 2:7). We must love all the saints, bear an extensive kindness and good-will to good men, notwithstanding smaller points of difference, and many real weaknesses. Some understand it of their charity to the saints in necessity, which is one branch and evidence of Christian love. (3) For their hope: *The hope which is laid up for you in heaven* (v. 5). The happiness of heaven is called their hope, because it is the *thing hoped for, looking for the blessed hope* (Titus 2:13). What is laid out upon believers in this world is much; but what is laid up for them in heaven is much more. And we have reason to give thanks to God for the hope of heaven which good Christians have, or their well-grounded expectation of the future glory. Their faith in Christ, and love to the saints, had an eye to the *hope laid up for*

them in heaven. The more we fix our hopes on the recompense of reward in the other world, the more free and liberal shall we be of our earthly treasure upon all occasions of doing good.²

A. The grace of faith

We read in 2 Thessalonians 3:2, “not all have faith.” Why, then, do some have faith and some do not? Faith is the product of God’s grace in the soul. ***Faith*** is that grace that God gives His elect whereby they believe God’s Word containing His promises and His warnings. They hear of the way of salvation freely offered them in Jesus Christ as the only Savior of guilty sinners, and they embrace Him as such, as God’s great provision for their great need.

That faith is a result of the work of god’s grace in the soul is confirmed to us forthrightly in Scripture. We read of Apollos coming into Achaia (southern Greece), to minister the Word of God:

And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those ***who had believed through grace.*** (Acts 18:27)

And then there are the verses that we all know intimately, which read,

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Eph 2:8, 9)

But the apostle does not just speak of the grace of faith alone in these believers that he recalled when he prayed for them. He wrote of “remembering before our God and Father ***your work of faith.***” True faith is seen in what it produces in the believer. True faith will show itself in good works. Paul had written to the churches of Galatia, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but ***faith working through love***” (Gal. 5:6). Paul rejoiced to hear of the work that the faith in the believers produced.

It is at this point that we come to a very great problem area among evangelicals. Most evangelicals have been taught pretty well about justification by faith alone. It is rehearsed and presented frequently, as it should be. We do this well. However, take note of this: many evangelicals are errant in their thinking about ***the necessity of works in order to inherit salvation.*** You see, they know that faith is the only instrument for justification, but ***they wrongly conclude that there are no other conditions that have bearing on their full and final salvation.*** Although this wrong notion has always reared its down through church history, it is at this current time a major error that is held among evangelicals today.

This was apparently not a major problem in **Jonathan Edward’s** day. I mention him because he was the leading American evangelical pastor in America in the early to mid-1700’s. He is generally regarded to one of the most influential and significant Christian leaders that America has ever produced. Moreover I mention him because he was the one who was used of God to initially stir the colonies in the revival of the early 1700’s known as ***The Great Awakening.*** As many as one third of the colonists became Christian in just a matter of a few years. The entire fabric of society was transformed. Edwards championed the teaching of justification by faith alone as did the Puritans in England and New England and the Protestant Reformers of a century before. He wrote a significant sermon entitled “*Justification by Faith Alone.*” In this sermon he wrote:

And there are many other things besides faith, which are directly proposed to us, to be pursued or performed by us, in order to eternal life, which if they are done, or obtained, we shall have eternal life, and if not done, or not obtained, we shall surely perish.³

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vo. 6 (Fleming H. Revell). p. 749.

³ Edwards, p. 623.

Later in the sermon he wrote,

So are many other things besides faith; and yet nothing in us but faith renders it meet (fitting) that we should have justification assigned to us.⁴

And then later on in the same sermon he wrote,

We frequently find (in the Bible) promises of eternal life and salvation, and sometimes justification itself, made to our own virtue and obedience. Eternal life is promised to obedience, in Romans 2:7 . .

And,

Obedience and salvation are connected in fact; which nobody denies...⁵

But the fact remains is this, today, many do deny that obedience is in any way connected with salvation. “As long as you believe, it does not matter what you do” is often the message that is either explicitly stated or it is implicitly implied in a skewed twisting of this doctrine. Although faith alone justifies, that faith is not a mere affirmation or assertion of who Christ is and what He has done. The faith that saves is a living vital thing that shapes the course and nature of the entire life of a justified person. So much so, that God can say that: *“the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him”* (Heb. 10:38). In other words there is no salvation promised to one who does not live, as a Christian is to live.

Paul, while praying, was remembering their “labor of love” (1:3). Let us consider...

B. The grace of love

Paul declared that when he prayed for these people he recalled their *“labor of love.”* When God converts a sinner by His grace to faith in Jesus Christ, He produces the love of God in the heart of that new believer. We read in Romans 5:5, “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” The Holy Spirit produces in His people the love of God.

Arthur Pink wrote of this grace of love:

Regeneration is that *miracle of Divine grace wrought in the soul which enlists the affections Godward*, which brings the human will into subjection to the Divine, and which produces a real and radical change in the life. That change is from worldliness to godliness, from disobedience to obedience. *At the new birth, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and that love is manifested in a dominating longing and sincere purpose to please in all things the One who has plucked me as a brand from the burning.* There is a greater difference between the genuine Christian and the deceived professing Christian than there is between a living man and a corpse. None need remain in doubt if they will *honestly measure themselves* by the Holy Word of God.

How is this love for God manifest in us? How do you show your love for God?

1. We love God by imitating Him. We seek to conform our thinking to His way of thinking. We seek to live and behave toward others in a way that He treats people. Those who love God are

⁴ Ibid, p. 624.

⁵ Ibid, p. 642.

“followers” of him. They walk in the same footsteps as their Lord walked before them. People who love God seek to become like God. Children tend to mimic their fathers. God’s children manifest the characteristic of their fathers. Our Lord could say of the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do” (John 8:44). So the opposite is true with the children of God. They love God so the works of their Father they will do. We love God by striving to be like Him and by desiring to be conformed to the image of His Son.

2. We love God by making His glory the supreme end of all their actions. This is God’s purpose in all things, that He might be glorified. If we love God we will desire the same--His glory. We love the Lord by seeking to deflect all credit from ourselves and set forward our God to where He is the focus of attention and appreciation. The one who truly loves God seeks to lead others to exalt Him in their estimation. The one who loves God sees all of life to be dedicated to this end. The one that loves God desires intensely “that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11).

3. We love God by desiring and delighting in communion with God. When you love someone, you want to be with that one. You enjoy that person’s presence. You are unhappy or unfulfilled during periods of separation. People who love God desire fellowship with God and to be with others that love God. Do not claim to love God greatly if it is not your desire to be with God. When we pray and read His Word, when we gather together on the Lord’s Day and speak of Him and He meets with us, it should delight us. We are loving God when we do these things. We should desire His presence and value it highly. People do not come into God’s presence regularly and faithfully because they do not love Him.

4. Similarly, we love God when we are faithful to Him even though we may not be enjoying times of communion with God. There are times when we do not feel to be in fellowship with God. We might address the reasons for this at another time. But we should recognize that God Himself will at times withdraw from us so that we do not enjoy His presence. Sometimes this may be for extended periods of time. But the one who truly loves God is distressed when this occurs. And so our love for God is seen in our disappointment and grief during these times, and in our longing for restored communion. We are distressed and cry out as did Zion during the days she was forsaken of the Lord, saying, “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me!” (Isa. 49:14).

5. We love God when we are faithful to Him even though we do not experience good things from Him. Job was faithful, not only when God had blessed Him with wealth, health, and family, but also when God had taken these things away. “The Lord giveth; the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Satan had accused Job before God as only being true to God because He was meeting Job’s needs. God demonstrated to the devil that this was not the case. God gave leave to Satan to take from Job all that he delighted in. The result? Job still delighted in God.

6. We love God when we live in such a way that we are careful not to offend Him by sinning against him. David loved God intensely. But it was a love characterized by a keen sense of what would please or offend God. When the occasion presented itself for David to escape his suffering by slaying King Saul, even as he was being urged by his men to do so, and even when Providence made it possible, he said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord” (1 Sam. 24:6). Those who claim they love God but live in a manner irrespective of what offends God, do not love Him at all.

7. We love God by suffering for His cause and by turning away from those things or people that would turn us away from Him. Ruth said to Naomi, “Wherever you go I will go, where you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God.” Ruth loved her mother-in-law and was willing to part with all to be able to continue with her. So Abraham was willing to leave his

father's house and his home country in order to walk with God. We too, love God by giving up relationships that will be detrimental to our fellowship with God. We love Him so we will love those who love Him and we will not make close associations with any but those who have similar affections. Similarly, we love God by our willingness to sacrifice that which might be dear to us but that we know will lead us in ways contrary to His will.

8. We love God by having a high regard for God's house, His church (congregation), His worship, and ordinances. He dwells and manifests His presence through and among His people. Those who love Him, therefore, love His church. It is good to be where God's glory is manifest. When Peter stood on the Mount and saw the glory of Jesus manifest, He said, "Master, it is good for us to be here" (Luke 9:12). There is a satisfaction in the hearts of those who love God when God's glory is displayed. They who claim to love God but react to God's glory or are uninterested in God's glory, do not love Him as they should or could.

9. We love God by loving His Word and the truths that it contains. Those who love God love God's Word. Those who love God receive readily the truth of God. Even when the Word comes and seems to run counter to their own thinking, they immediately acquiesce and conform their values and their opinions to what the Bible affirms. Those who love God esteem God's Word more than "necessary food." They seek out His Word, "and eat it, and it is the joy and rejoicing of their hearts; the feet of them that bring the good tidings of it are beautiful unto them."

10. We love God when we hate evil. Those who show their hatred for evil do show their love for God. Proverbs 8:13 reads, "You that love the Lord, **hate evil.**" Psalm 97:10, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. "Those who turn from evil and seek to avoid evil, abstaining from the appearance of it, love God. Those who do not hate evil do not love God.

11. We love God by lowering in our estimation all things in comparison of God. 1 John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Here are the words of John Gill,

To love the world, and the things of it, in an immoderate manner, is not consistent with the love of the Father, or with profession of love to him; for the friendship of the world is enmity with God; and a man cannot be a friend of the world and a lover of God; no man can serve two masters God and mammon; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or hold to the one and despise the other. (J. Gill)

12. We love God by obeying His commandments.

John 14:21. "He that has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me: and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

John 14:23. "Jesus answered and said unto him, 'If a man love me, he will keep my words.'"

1 John 5:3. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

2 John 6. "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments."

13. We love God by loving the people of God.

1 John 4:20. “If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

1 John 4:21. “And this commandment have we from him, that he who loves God love his brother also.”

1 John 5:1. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him.”

1 John 3:10. “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother.”

1 John 3:14. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death.”

Again, John Gill wrote that this was an evidence of salvation: “They love those who are begotten of him, and bear his image; and they are taught of him to do this in their regeneration, and which is an evidence that they have passed from death to life, and are born again.”

14. We love God by loving our enemies. Our Lord Jesus taught us, “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat 5:44).

This brings us back to the greatest of commandments. For not only has God commanded, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength”, but He has given a second as well, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’

C. The grace of hope

Whenever Paul prayed for these Christians, he remembered their “*steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*” *Hope* is that grace that God gives to His people in order to comfort them and strengthen them in their walk of faith. The Lord’s people bear heavy burdens in this fallen world, but our Lord has so provided for them that He is able to ease the burden of them who serve Him. How does He lighten the burden that weighs upon His people? He does not remove the burdens. He does not make the burdens less intense for His people; in fact, generally the difficulty that His people encounter in this world is more severe than those who do not live for Him. Rather, He strengthens His people to endure their trials. And what is it that gives believers strength? It is what the Bible describes as *hope*. Discouraged people are hopeless people. But believers who are encouraged to face their trials boldly and with peace, for they are ones who have the hope of God sustaining them.

What is the nature of biblical hope? *Hope is a certain anticipation of what most assuredly will occur.* Because the Christian believes what God has said concerning all that is promised to him through Christ, he is infused with hope--*the deep-settled certainty that all the good that God has promised will most certainly come to pass.* This joyous anticipation changes the believer’s outlook toward all that he faces. He sees what he is enduring is temporary and that a glorious future awaits him. This anticipation of the realization of God’s promises is what strengthens him to endure, yes, even rejoice through his present trials.

We read in Romans 12:12, “*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*” Is your life as a Christian characterized in rejoicing? Perhaps it is not, for you are rejoicing in something other than what God has promised you in Jesus Christ. But when the believer has hope in God’s promises that they will most certainly come to pass, this joyous anticipation changes the believer’s outlook toward

all that he faces. He sees what he is enduring is temporary and that a glorious future awaits him. This anticipation of the realization of God's promises is what strengthens him to endure, yes, even rejoice through his present trials.

And so, if you will purpose to "rejoice in hope", you will find yourself being "patient in tribulation." And so, first, *see the glorious future before us with the certain prospect of our God's future blessing*. Because we know with certainty what we shall most surely receive, we are infused with hope which effects the way we live; it is a "living hope". And because the prospect is so bright, it causes earthly matters to fade in significance. What results us that *we become a people living in the prospect of the future*. We are a forward-looking people. Not for what we might purchase with next week's pay check, or the prospect of enjoying next year's vacation, although these are pleasant. These are not the things that drive our lives; rather, it is the prospect of eternity, which moves and shapes our thinking and actions. We are to *anticipate with joy our future resurrection*. We long for God's kingdom to be realized. We look forward to our reunion with loved ones, our coming into God's presence, as the things that give strength to us in living now. This will lead us to be dependent upon God, trusting Him, as we pray to Him faithfully. Let us *"Rejoice in hope* so that we will be *patient in tribulation*, even as we are *constant in prayer*."

May the Lord continue to produce and enhance these manifestations of His grace in our souls, so that others may render thanksgiving to God when they remember "before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen.
Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Rev 22:20f)
