

## **Faith Under Fire: Thriving in a Hostile World**

### **Priorities of the Blessed 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28**

#### **Introduction**

Paul has been writing to believers in Thessalonica whose faith is under fire. And it's been that way from the start. Persecution so severe that the missionaries were driven out. But despite all the hostility, these believers are thriving. The Scriptural record of God's amazing work in their lives serves as encouragement to us as well. The world is still hostile to God and His people. But they are still thriving because God is still God, and they belong to Him.

**23** Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **24** He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

**25** Brothers, pray for us.

**26** Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

**27** I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

**28** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Our text begins and ends with a benediction—a pronouncement of blessing.

23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely . . . .

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Between these two benedictions are three commands. Blessed with peace and grace from God through Christ, we who are members of the family of God have these priorities to fulfill.

Pray for us.

Greet all the brothers.

Read this letter to all the brothers.

### Priorities of the Blessed

1. The Blessing of Sanctifying Peace (23-24)
2. The Priority of Intercessory Prayer (25)
3. The Priority of Welcoming Affection (26)
4. The Priority of Scriptural Instruction (27)
5. The Blessing of Present Grace (28)

### **1. The Blessing of Sanctifying Peace (23-24)**

<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

The God of peace—the God who reconciles sinners to Himself and restores all things to the very good He created them to be.

It is our restoration to fellowship with God that breaks the tyranny of sin and makes holiness possible. The sanctifying power of closeness to God.

Completely—translates a word that combines the ideas of being whole or entire with a word that means end or goal. Fully reaching the intended goal.

Whole spirit, soul, and body—complete in every part of who you are spiritually, emotionally, physically. Our identity in Christ is a holy identity. We are not defined by our sin, but by our belonging to God through Christ. This is not mere outward conformity without inward reality, nor is it purely intellectual or philosophical or emotional with no action attached to it. God is at work in every part of us to bring about His goal for us that we be sanctified completely.

Our inheritance includes sinless immortality. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the downpayment, seal, and guarantee of that full measure of holiness. Else our striving against sin would be powerless and hopeless.

## **Kept blameless**

Protected, guarded. God is watching over us to see to it that we are blameless before Him.

John 17:11-12, 15

**11** And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. **12** While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

**15** I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

### **At the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ**

His royal visit is sure. Human history is rushing toward that day. God makes believers ready and eager.

1 Thessalonians 5:24

He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

God's own faithful character and His sovereign ability make our complete sanctification not a wishful dream but a certain destiny. "We are not alone. Our God is with us." He has called us to Himself, and He will complete what He has begun.

## **Applications**

- How could the settled confidence that you belong to the God of peace and that He is committed to sanctifying you completely shape your thinking, choices, and activity each day?
- What are ways you can live in keeping with God the Father's purpose for you, God the Son's intercession for you, and God the Spirit's work in you?

## **2. The Priority of Intercessory Prayer (25)**

Brothers, pray for us.

This is the first of three priorities Paul emphasizes here for the brothers—those who have been made family by the God of peace. The fellowship we enjoy with God unfailingly creates fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. These three priorities reflect and strengthen that bond of family love.

Paul has already expressed in this letter that he and his fellow missionaries faithfully pray for these brother and sisters in Christ. But here, he asks them to pray for him, Timothy, and Silas.

This is the way he talks to all the churches he writes. He is an apostle. He writes Scriptures. He is a missionary. He has pointed countless numbers of people to Christ. But he needs

their prayers and highly values them. *No believer, however used by God to benefit others, is beyond the urgent need of prayer.*

He writes from the notoriously wicked city of Corinth. Immoral. Proud. Divisive. He has encountered stiff opposition—enough to be unnerving. He has been kicked out of the synagogue, but God opened a house for him next door then turned the leader of the synagogue to faith (Crispus). Christ Himself came to him in the visions of the night to encourage him to keep on preaching, that Christ had many people in this city yet to trust in Jesus.

In his second letter to the church in Thessalonica, also written from Corinth not long after the first letter, Paul asks them to pray specifically “that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)

### **Applications**

- Who are the brothers and sisters in Christ for whom you pray regularly?
- Who are the brothers and sisters who faithfully pray for you?
- What are some practical ways you can further such mutual praying for one another?

### **3. The Priority of Welcoming Affection (26)**

Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

Greet—to embrace or welcome; an expression of family unity and love

With a holy kiss—holy as distinguished from romance; in the Middle East both then and now, a kiss on the cheek is the customary greeting for family or friends

The custom continues in many places in the world. In our culture a warm handshake or brief hug are a common way of greeting those we care about.

People in happy families display this regularly. The point is to show a welcoming affection toward one another. Not partiality. Not dismissiveness. Not self-absorption. Not contempt. Not aloofness. Not ignoring one another or avoiding one another. What makes it remarkable is that this welcoming affection is for “all the brothers.” Every believer, man, woman, and child, rich, poor, educated, uneducated, young, old.

Whenever we are together in small or large groups, the sense of warm family affection among us should be obvious. We each need that kind of welcome, that sense of

belonging, the “you are safe here” and “you are loved here” community of believers.

Further, those outside of Christ need to see that kind of love displayed for one another. It is the spirit that Christ creates among His people by the transforming power of the gospel, and it is powerful and compelling. It displays the fellowship we now enjoy with God the Father, Son, and Spirit, with all the saints, and invites others to enter in through trusting in Christ to save them, too.

### **Applications**

- How can you better express your family affection for the brothers and sisters in Christ you know?
- What attitudes, words, or actions contrary to such affectionate care do you need to confess and forsake?

## **4. The Priority of Scriptural Instruction (27)**

I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

Accountability before the divine Judge of all the universe

### **Have this letter read**

Public reading of the letter

Paul's words reflect the Scriptural status of what he has written. The Christians in Thessalonica are to treat this letter as they would the OT Scriptures which had been read publicly for centuries when the people of God gathered for worship. Paul gives the same charge to the Colossians, and tells them to pass it on to other local bodies of believers as well. In time both the people of God would read portions from the OT prophets and the NT apostles each time they gathered for worship.

*God's people OT and NT regularly gathered to listen to the Scriptures read publicly. And whenever you find a healthy church ever since, you will find the same practice. The Scriptures thus delivered are the chief authoritative means by which God leads His people through the challenges of living in a world hostile to Him.*

Joshua 1:8

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

**All the brothers**—all believers need the apostolic instruction Paul has written. It is not just for the intellectual elite. Brothers and

sisters of every age group and background, every ethnicity and socio-economic group. The first-century churches were a mix because the gospel is for everyone.

The majority of first-century population could read—it was a very literate society, slave or free, but movable type printing did not happen till Gutenberg, so most people could not afford books. Anything they had in their possession was hand copied—*manuscript* means hand written. The value of the NT Scriptures led to their being copied over and over again wherever they went. That is why they are by far the best attested ancient documents in all of human history—by far the most copies and the oldest copies when compared to any other ancient manuscripts.

A great gift to us. We can know that when we read the NT today, there is no question that we are reading a translation of what the apostles actually wrote.

### **Applications**

- What practical steps can you take to make sure you make God's written word is a priority in your daily and weekly routine?
- What tends to undermine your attention to the Word, and how can you counteract it?

## **5. The Blessing of Present Grace (28)**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Grace—favor, goodness that we have not earned; it is a gift from our Lord, the God-man Savior, the spirit-anointed King of an everlasting kingdom

Be with you—grace is an ever-present blessing from Christ to give us the power to live as His people.

Matthew 28:20

“Behold, I am with you all the days, even to the consummation of the age.”

### **Applications**

- How can knowing you have the undeserved and constant loving favor of the Lord Jesus Christ on your life shape the way you navigate each day?
- How could knowing that God’s peace and God’s grace empowers all genuine Christian living protect you from self-reliant pride or despair?

### **Conclusion**

Paul loves these believers, but their ability to survive and thrive in a hostile world comes from God not man. Their history makes that obvious. And this letter affirms that reality.

The way they live grows from divine blessings.

1. The Blessing of Sanctifying Peace
2. The Priority of Intercessory Prayer
3. The Priority of Welcoming Affection
4. The Priority of Scriptural Instruction
5. The Blessing of Present Grace

Closing Song: What Grace Is Mine

### **Summary of Applications**

- How could the settled confidence that you belong to the God of peace and that He is committed to sanctifying you completely shape your thinking, choices, and activity each day?
- What are ways you can live in keeping with God the Father's purpose for you, God the Son's intercession for you, and God the Spirit's work in you?
- Who are the brothers and sisters in Christ for whom you pray regularly?
- Who are the brothers and sisters who faithfully pray for you?
- What are some practical ways you can further such mutual praying for one another?
- How can you better express your family affection for the brothers and sisters in Christ you know?

- What attitudes, words, or actions contrary to such affectionate care do you need to confess and forsake?
- What practical steps can you take to make sure you make God's written word is a priority in your daily and weekly routine?
- What tends to undermine your attention to the Word, and how can you counteract it?
- How can knowing you have the undeserved and constant loving favor of the Lord Jesus Christ on your life shape the way you navigate each day?
- How could knowing that God's peace and God's grace empowers all genuine Christian living protect you from self-reliant pride or despair?