

1 Thessalonians: Conclusion

Call to Worship: Psalm 8

Hymn #1 (Supp.): *All Creatures of Our God and King*

1st Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20

Hymn Insert: *O Church Arise*

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28

Hymn Insert: *Benediction Song*

Introduction:

Last time, we considered Paul's Benedictory blessing upon the Thessalonians. This morning, we conclude this first Epistle, by looking at the few final charges that Paul leaves with them.

I. Brethren, Pray for Us

"Brethren, pray for us." Consider the implication of this plea, followed by a few specific ways, in which, Paul would have the Thessalonians pray for him:

1) The Implication of this Plea

Paul calls them "brethren," and he pleads with them to pray for him. What is the implication of this plea? Simply put, Paul considered these newly converted believers, made up of Jews and Gentiles, as standing on an equal footing with him. Though he was an Apostle; though he was an Apostle with a thorough understanding of the Scriptures; though he was an Apostle who had received visions from the Lord and who had done much for the kingdom of God already, these were his brethren. These were his brothers and sisters of the same spiritual household. And as such, he coveted, desired and needed their prayers.

Paul knew that they all came to God through the same Mediator, and that being the case, they all had access to the same Father, being in union with the same Christ. These Thessalonian brethren could intercede on behalf of Paul, and that, unto aiding in the prosperity of his work and labor in the Lord. Notice, that while Paul most certainly prayed for them often (we've seen this already, back in the first chapter), he is not so far above them; he is not so close to God, that he doesn't require and covet their prayers on his behalf. No doubt, the assumption is, that in some very real sense, in accordance with God's providential working out of all things, the prayers of His people, impact and affect the lives and ministries of one another. It is not just those in

leadership, who pray for the average lay person. No, perhaps even with greater necessity, the average lay people uphold and advance the ministries of the leadership by their prayers. And in this sense, they contribute to the success of the ministry as a whole. Because we cannot see the outworking of our prayers (at least on many occasions), we don't realize just how much God is using them in the advancement of His kingdom. There is probably a very large group of "unheard of's" in heaven, whom we will not find in any written biographies, who have accomplished far more for the kingdom of God, by prayer, than most have accomplished in actual visible labor. The Apostles helped lay the very foundation of the church, no doubt, with the adhesive cement of the prayers of God's people. How much more will the lesser leadership of today, prosper on, and require the prayers of God's people?

And so, the implication here is that the playing field is leveled, regarding the important part that every individual believer plays, in advancing the kingdom of God. Paul pleads with his Thessalonian brethren to carry him to the throne of grace, in prayer.

2) Specific Requests

While there is no limit to the specific types of requests, which the Thessalonians could offer up to God on Paul's behalf, it is helpful to consider the types of requests that he most coveted. Now, some of you might justifiably say, "Well Pastor, there is nothing specific given in this text." While that is true, we have other texts that can help us grasp what Paul was after, or what most burdened him in the coveting of these prayers. And the good news is that we don't have to go too far to get a sense of what Paul was requesting, concerning the types of intercessory prayers he desired to be made on his behalf. In fact, writing to the same audience, in 2 Thessalonians, Paul makes a similar request, but with added details:

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith."

Here, we find two specific concerns, which would have certainly topped the list of Paul's prayer requests.

First, "that the Word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you." And so, when Paul seeks the Thessalonian's prayer on his behalf, his priority was that the

Gospel, which he preached, would spread quickly and prosper, even as it had with the Thessalonians. Paul desired that his labors would be carried to the throne room of God by the Thessalonians, so that, by the grace of God and the necessary accompanying power of the Holy Spirit, the lost would be saved. And what is Paul assuming by this? That apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, his best efforts and labors even, will not prevail one iota upon the hearts of blind, lost, dead sinners. God must give the increase or all of our sowing will never take root. And so, Paul enlists "Spirit empowered" beggars, to beg God with him, to anoint his labors with power, such that spiritual strongholds would be torn down, blind eyes would be opened, and dead souls would be raised unto new life, as Paul sought to faithfully preach the Gospel.

Secondly, Paul prayed "that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith." In keeping with the first request, Paul also knew that the lost would not hear and be saved, unless some were sent to preach the Gospel to them. And so, he prayed that all obstacles would be overcome, not so much for Paul's own comfort (he knew that chains and afflictions awaited him at every turn), but rather, that the spreading of the Gospel would not be hindered. It was inevitable that he should continually face the persecutions wrought by unreasonable and wicked men, but he desired that God would bring about deliverance (not necessarily without pain, but deliverance nonetheless) for the sake of the Gospel!

These were the priorities on Paul's list of prayer requests. And brethren, before we move on, let us simply note the Gospel and Christ centered focus, which drove Paul forth, even to the extent that these were the primary desires that he would have others bring to God on his behalf, to be fulfilled. May God grant us all such a "heaven bound" heart, and especially those in the Gospel ministry.

Application #1: Brethren, let me appeal to you on behalf of the leadership of this church, to pray for us. Your prayers count, brethren! Pray for the ministry of the Word. Pray that all opposition to the work of the Gospel would be overcome. Pray for sinners to be saved. Pray for our church to grow and to progress in our sanctification. Pray for the leadership to withstand temptation and to maintain holy conduct and godliness, so that the Gospel will not suffer reproach because of us. Pray for us!

II. Greet All the Brethren With a Holy Kiss

Secondly then, Paul exhorts them to "greet all the brethren with a holy kiss."

Now, sadly, in our day and age (and in our American culture), it is not customary for men to kiss men on the cheek without certain implications being drawn, but the principle herein given, remains the same, doesn't it? Even if we substitute a handshake for the kiss, consider the principle that Paul is laying forth here.

Paul goes out of his way here, not only to call for prayer (on his behalf), but also to call the brethren to exercise mutual expressions of brotherly love to each other, by greeting one another with a holy kiss. It is holy, because it is motivated by our common union and fellowship in Christ. We are family, in a way, which supersedes flesh and blood even. There are two things that I want to note about this charge, before moving on:

1) First, it might be argued that Paul is here telling his audience to give all the brethren a holy kiss, on his behalf. And this would make sense, wouldn't it? How many times do we say to others, "Please send my love and greetings to so and so..." Now, while this is certainly possible, I want to suggest that Paul is, at the least, also charging them to exercise this greeting one to the other because A) This letter is written to the church as a whole (see 1:1 & 5:27) and B) Paul has issued this same charge in other places, clearly implying that he desires the brethren to greet each other in this way.

Romans 16:16- "Greet one another with a holy kiss."

1 Corinthians 20- " All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss."

2 Corinthians 16:12- "Greet one another with a holy kiss."

And so, we find that it was a customary charge for Paul to command the brethren to greet one another with a holy kiss.

2) The second thing that I want you to notice here is that Paul charges them to greet *all* the brethren with a holy kiss. In other words, this type of a mutual godly affection was to be expressed to all in the body, and not just toward those with whom we are most comfortable. The body of Christ is composed of all of the parts and not just some. And so, while the arm might be most comfortable greeting the hand, the arm must also greet the legs and the toes as well.

Application #2: Now brethren, while it would be virtually impossible to greet everyone, every time we assemble as a body, how many of us make a conscious effort to express this type of a warm, holy greeting, to all of the brethren at some time or even semi-regularly? Do you know everyone in the body even? Are you making a conscious effort to get to know everyone? Do you come to fellowship gatherings, so that opportunities are present to affectionately greet the brethren? Or, do you run right out after the service is over and show up the following Sunday to do the same, leaving no such opportunity to come about?

You see, this is Christianity 101 in many ways, isn't it? Why does Paul emphasize the importance of greeting all the brethren? Because, if we can't greet one another, how can we love and meet the needs of one another? All of the "one another" commands of Scripture find their very basic foundation and existence in a simple greeting. Who don't you know in this body? Let me exhort you to make it a point to find that person and give them a hearty greeting. Look at your church directory and ask yourself the same question. Be determined to find and get to know those people. You might say, "Well pastor, how can I do that? What if I don't know what to say?" Here's my response to that. You have more in common with these brethren in Christ; you have a deeper connection with those who you don't even know, who are in Christ, than you have with anyone else in the entire World! Just introduce yourself. Ask how they are doing. Get to know each other and revel in the common fellowship you have in Christ! You can spend hours talking to others about things that have no eternal value, can you not spend minutes speaking about eternal matters that you share in Christ? At the very least, greet one another affectionately in Christ!

III. Read this Letter to All the Brethren

"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren" (vs. 27).

Paul's final charge is that this letter be read to everyone. The fact that he adds the phrase "by the Lord," indicates at least two things:

1) The issues represented in this letter were vitally important in light of the present context of ongoing persecution, which was being experienced by the church. Paul wanted to ensure that all of the brethren had this critical information, so that they would be able to view

their present trials from a biblical standpoint, which would lead them to persevere and to keep on keeping on. We probably ought to get a sense of the infallible, divine inspiration from these words as well. Paul must be very confident about all that he is saying, if he places this kind of a necessity on having everyone in the church hear it. "I charge you before the Lord," involves a sense of putting someone under a certain obligation to do whatever is being charged. It is another way of saying, "The Lord wants you to do this" or "Thus saith the Lord." Divine inspiration is implied here.

2) Paul was deeply concerned for every individual sheep, who made up Christ's church. As an undershepherd, he would not be satisfied if some or even most of the sheep made it. He longed for every single one of them. Like the Chief Shepherd, it were as if he knew them all by name. And so, let us see the particular severity of this charge, as a further opening of Paul's heart, exposing his deep love for the whole church. What he has to say here, was life giving oxygen for a people who were being suffocated by severe opposition and persecution.

Application #3: Brethren, may we all have such a heart for all of the brethren. May we be concerned for the spiritual welfare of every soul within the camp, such that, we would do all to protect and preserve them in their spiritual walk with the Lord. May it lead us to say even the uncomfortable things, if we are truly convinced it is unto the betterment of others. We are our brother's keeper.

Application #4: Paul's mindset about everyone reading this letter, should be our mindset about reading the entirety of God's Word. God gave us 66 books. He gave us Two Testaments. He gave us the Books of John and Romans, and the Books of Leviticus and Obadiah. All of God's Word is sufficient to aid in our spiritual growth. So much more could have been said. So much information we are not given. And so, what God has given, is given for a very specific, divine purpose; a complete purpose in benefitting our spiritual wellbeing. Let us be among those who read through the entire Bible, cover to cover, as many times as we can, until the Lord should call us home.

IV. Conclusion

As is customary for Paul, he concludes this letter with the final Benedictory statement, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

It may seem like a flippant statement or just "the right thing to say," but this Benedictory statement of Paul's, sums up what is most essential to the Christian's survival. There's a reason why he uses it often, and there's a reason why he uses a similar statement at the beginning of the letter (Read 1:1). He sandwiches his letter with this phrase because he knows very well that the grace of Christ contains every ounce of oxygen that we need to survive the walk to glory. The Christian life begins with the grace of God (indeed, it is preceded by the grace of God from before the foundation of the world), it continues only in the grace of God, and it enters glory only by the grace of God. Without the grace of God, we wouldn't make it an inch on the road to glory, brethren. Unless Christ constantly washes our feet, as it were, we would completely defile the path, the whole way home. But God is indeed gracious! But the atonement of Christ; the blessed shed blood of Christ is so rich with grace, that it is capable of swallowing up and completely extinguishing all of our sins, combined for all ages!

And so, when Paul says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," he is saying, "May that, which alone gives, maintains and preserves your life unto eternity; Christ's free favor (merited through His own vicarious sacrifice), be with you always. May you have all of the oxygen that you need to survive this life, until you make it home to glory.

Application #5: Friends, let me put the whole of this conclusive matter, this way: Without the grace of Christ, we have absolutely no means of standing before the presence of our holy God. If the Christian needs a constant, daily dose of this grace, to make it home to glory, where does that leave you, who are presently outside of Jesus Christ? If you are not in union with Christ, then you are presently under the judgment of God, and if you die in that state, you will be the object of God's righteous wrath, forever. You must understand, that you, like the rest of us, have been born with a sinful nature, which is opposed to (at enmity with) God. And this is shown by the rebellious lifestyle, within which you live... [the Gospel]

AMEN!!!

The Lord's Supper!