

MAKING MY PRAYER WITH JOY (Study 4)

The Joy of the Holy Spirit

The Joy of the Holy Spirit as we come to prayer links with P.T. Forsyth's sentence: 'Words fail us in prayer oftener than anywhere else; and the Spirit must come in aid of our infirmity, set out our case to God, and give to us an outspoken freedom in prayer, the possession of our central soul, the reality of our inmost personality in organic contact with His'.¹

1 Thessalonians 1: 1 – 10; verse 6, commencing with an emphatic *you*, meaning 'you yourselves' ... *you received the word in much affliction, with the JOY of the Holy Spirit*. They possessed the fruit of the Spirit as do all believers; which comes from forgiveness in Christ and the coming of the Spirit. Christ knew joy in doing His Father's will; as do we in doing the Father's will in love; the outflow and overflow of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This overflow in Paul's life is expressed in a letter of pastoral concern demonstrating his personal affection for the church; **verse 1** and continuing with *thanks*, **verse 2**. Not just a common greeting but underlining 'loving kindness' and 'compassion'. Behind these words were times of discouragement for Paul in four centres; Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. Then, following reports of growth in the believers at Thessalonica, Paul wrote with words of thanksgiving; **verses 1 - 6**. The Holy Spirit doesn't give power to the word but releases the power that is in the word and the word effects its own results; **verse 5**.

People are (inwardly/outwardly) restless when alienated from God and therefore from the truth of Christ, for they see God through the lens of their own guilt. **Verses 8 & 9** reveal that true proclamation came/comes from those radically changed by the word and Spirit. Note also that Paul's JOY in prayer is in the context of his love for the church **2:17** and his use of the word *brothers*. Prayer is not for the sake of prayer but out of love which comes from God; John 3: 16. Paul was constrained by *love*, **2 Corinthians 5:14**; this is illustrated in **1 Thessalonians 3: 6 – 13**; emphasising *thanks in joy*, **verse 9**. Mind, will, emotions, the whole person passionate in prayer; **verses 10 – 13**. This was not triumphalism for Paul prays in **verse 10** from a sense of loss and the word *prayer* expresses his feeling of need. He also struggles *most earnestly* to express words too deep for words. – Calvin; this verse is an indication of the importance of Christian teaching: 'From this it is clear how much we must devote ourselves to teaching. For teachers were not ordained only that in one day or in one month they should bring men to the faith of Christ, but that they should bring to completion the faith that has just begun'.²

¹ P.T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*, New Creation Publications, 2008, 18

² John Calvin, Leon Morris, *1 Thessalonians*, Tyndale Press, 1963, 69, (cited in W. Neil)

Where is such teaching carried out? Home, social spheres, sport, meal table. The constant battles of love, grace, consideration, prayer keep reminding us that Christian action, some would say social action, is easier than prayer. We can be devotional, express, even preach concern for the hungry, and seek to appease our conscience, but neglect prayer and the Word. The climax of Paul's prayer in JOY comes in **verses 11 -13**. In **verse 12** the human experience of love increases not love itself. **Verse 13** reveals the possibility of high moral standards and being humanly blameless, yet not be holy. But there is still *all the JOY that we feel for your sake before our God*; **verse 9**.

Forsyth: 'Bible searching and searching prayer go hand in hand. What we receive from God in the Book's message we return to Him with interest in prayer. Nothing puts us in living contact with God but prayer ...'³

³ P.T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer*, New Creation Publications, 2008, 46