

## PAUL, A MAN OF PRAYER

Acts 9:1-20

Intro: Today I want to begin a series of messages on The Prayers of the Apostle Paul. Anyone who has read Paul's epistles cannot keep himself from noticing the many prayers that are found in the letters which he wrote. There is no doubt but that he lived what we might call, a life of prayer. Prayer had a major part in his life from the time when he became a child of God.

I know of only one book written on the prayers of Paul. That is Arthur Pink's book with the title, Gleanings from Paul, Studies in the Prayers of the Apostle. There may be other books dealing with this subject which I don't know about. If you know of any, I hope you will let me know. There are, of course, hundreds of commentaries on the epistles of Paul in which we can find expositions of his prayers. I think that it would be hard to find any part of Scripture that could surpass Paul's prayers in the instruction they give us for our own prayers. That undoubtedly is one of the reasons the Holy Spirit has recorded so many of them.

In Mr. Pink's book he took up the prayers of Paul in the order in which they appear in our Bibles. That is, he started with his prayers in Romans, followed by his prayers in 1 and 2 Corinthians, then Galatians, and so on. And there is nothing wrong with that. But I am going to do it in a different order. I want to take them up in the order in which they were written--their chronological order. The advantage I see in this is that it will give us a kind of biography of the Apostle Paul's spiritual growth--his growth in grace.

We find some differences among those who have studied the chronology of the New Testament, but they are not major differences. No epistle really gives us an exact date. We have to take whatever historical references the Apostle made, and then piece them together to come up with some kind of a pattern.

It is generally agreed that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written first. W. P. Armstrong, who was the New Testament professor at Princeton Seminary in "the good old days," wrote the article on the chronology of the New Testament in the International Standard Biblical Encyclo-paedia. He said that these epistles to Thessalonica were written from Corinth on Paul's second missionary journey during the years 52 and 53 A. D. These were considered to be Paul's first group.

The second group, made up of eight epistles, was written during Paul's third missionary journey. These were:

- 1) 1 Corinthians, from Ephesus, about 55 A. D.
  - 2) Galatians, probably from Ephesus.
  - 3) 2 Corinthians, from Macedonia, about 57 A. D.
  - 4) Romans, from Corinth, about 57 or 58 A. D.
- And then the Prison Epistles, written from Rome, about 62 and 63 A. D.:
- 5) Colossians.
  - 6) Ephesians.
  - 7) Philemon.
  - 8) Philippians.

The last group, made up of three epistles, probably written in 67 and 68 A. D., contained:

- 1) 1 Timothy.
- 2) Titus.
- 3) 2 Timothy.

A. T. Robertson's arrangement was very similar:

- 1) 1 Thessalonians.
- 2) 2 Thessalonians.
- 3) 1 Corinthians.
- 4) 2 Corinthians.
- 5) Galatians.
- 6) Romans.
- 7) Philippians.
- 8) Philemon.
- 9) Colossians.
- 10) Ephesians.
- 11) 1 Timothy.
- 12) Titus.
- 13) 2 Timothy.

The variation seems to be between Galatians and the Corinthian epistles. W. R. Thompson, in Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, listed Galatians as Paul's first epistle. The order which I am going to follow is to divide the epistles into four groups:

- 1) 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
- 2) 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans.
- 3) Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon.
- 4) 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy.

And then I want to conclude with the book of Hebrews. We don't really know that Paul wrote Hebrews, but I feel that it is very likely that he did.

Anyway, this is the order that we will follow. If it is not the exact order, it is close enough to enable us to get a good understanding of Paul's spiritual pilgrimage, and how his prayer life grew as he got older.

So next Sunday we will begin looking at the prayers of Paul

in 1 Thessalonians. I would like for you to be reading that epistle. We have just recently finished our study of it in Sunday School, and so it ought to be somewhat fresh in the minds of those of you who have been coming to Sunday School.

Today I want us to consider Paul as a man of prayer. By that term I mean to convey the idea that, throughout Paul's life, prayer had a major part in his life. And we can see its beginning in our Scripture reading for today. I call your attention to the words:

I. "BEHOLD, HE PRAYETH" (Acts 9:11).

These words were spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ to Ananias about Paul. They tell us that the Lord knew what Paul was doing. They were words designed to quiet the fears which Ananias had about going to find Saul (as he was called then), and to convince Ananias that Saul of Tarsus was not the same man when he got to Damascus that he had been when he left Jerusalem.

It seems rather strange to me that the Lord Jesus would say, "Behold," as he spoke to Ananias. Of all the things that Saul had been doing during the three days that he had been blind, this is what the Lord called attention to. "Behold" is a word, whether in the OT or the NT, which was used to call attention to something very important. And J. A. Alexander said in his commentary on Acts that it "introduces something strange and unexpected" (p. 363).

Notice that Ananias used this word "behold" in verse 10, when he answered the Lord. This apparently was to indicate that Ananias was ready to do whatever the Lord wanted him to do, little realizing the mission on which the Lord was going to send him. But the Lord then spoke the words to Ananias that we find in verse 11. (Read.)

For the Lord to say that Saul was praying means that he was really praying, not just saying prayers in a ritualistic way. Saul was really talking to the Lord. There is no evidence that anyone told him that this was what he ought to do; Saul had been indwelt by the Holy Spirit (although he probably didn't know this at the time), and the Spirit prompted him to pray. He was pouring out his heart to the Lord, and it seems from the verses which followed that Saul was asking the Lord to restore his sight to him. (See vv. 12 and 17--and read.)

The Lord spoke to Ananias using the present tense meaning that Saul was praying at that very moment, and that he would be praying when Ananias got to him. The suggestion was that he had spent three days in prayer. We have an example here

of importunate prayer. It was in the same spirit that Jacob prayed at Peniel, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26). Saul of Tarsus was receiving his first lesson in that which was to occupy so much of his time from these days on to the end of his life. No one taught him how to pray. He was crying out to God from his heart because he realized as he had never realized before, that the Lord was the only One Who could help him. Saul, who seems to have been very self-confident and determined before, was left for three days to learn how helpless he was, and how dependent he was upon the Lord for the blessing that he needed.

This is one of the first evidences we can expect to see in the life of a person who has really been saved: "Behold, he prayeth." Paul was to learn much more about prayer in the years to come, but this is where it all started. God had sent forth the Spirit of His Son into the heart of Saul of Tarsus, and we find him saying, "Abba, Father." Cf. Rom. 8:15, 16,

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

Also Gal. 4:6,

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Saul did not know the full extent of what had happened to him, but he was experiencing the effect of it upon his heart and upon his lips. He was praying! And the Lord said that when Ananias went where Saul was, and found him, this is what he would be doing--praying!

Ananias went to Saul, found him in the house of Judas, whom we assume was also a believer, and Saul's sight was restored. But the Lord did something else for Saul which he would not have known about, nor understood at that moment. According to the later part of verse 17, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately after he received his sight, and the Holy Spirit, he was baptized, thus identifying himself with the crucified, buried, risen, and glorified Christ!

How often when we have physical needs, the Lord not only meets those needs, but He also does something spiritual for us which we had not even asked him to do. Saul wanted to see again, and the Lord gave him his sight. But he also gave Saul the Person of the Holy Spirit by which he would see spiritual truth. And this bringing me to another subject which I must mention before we move on.

Let me digress for a moment from the subject of prayer to show you in our text a second thing which Saul of Tarsus did shortly afterwards, which was also to become the other major part of his life. (Read Acts 9:19-22.)

- What do we have here? We have Saul of Tarsus praying, and then we find him preaching! Wouldn't you love to have been able to hear him praying, and then hear him preaching? And he did both powerfully even though he was just a babe in Christ. This probably means that suddenly the knowledge that Saul had of the Scriptures came to life and burned like a fire in his soul. He had learned much Scripture over many years before as he prepared to become a rabbi. Now he was seeing what he had never seen before--not only that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God, but that He was indeed the main subject of Scripture. Saul prayed with power, and then he preached with power. What we learn from Acts 9 is certainly one of the most amazing accounts to be found anywhere in the Word of God.

"Behold, he prayeth." And then we could add, "Behold, he preacheth!"

So we see in this where Paul began to be a man of prayer.

- But we see that he that he was a man of prayer in three other ways, one of which is related to what we have already seen.

## II. THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL AS A MAN OF PRAYER.

Next week, the Lord willing, we will be looking at 1 Thessalonians. Let me take you to that epistle to show you that in prayer, as in so many other ways, Paul was an example for us to follow. Look at 1 Thess. 1:2, 3.

Then look at 1 Thess. 2:13; 3:9, 10.

See 2 Thess. 1:11a; 2:13, 14.

Cf. Rom. 1:9. Also Eph. 1:15, 16. Then, Phil. 1:3-5. And Col. 1:3, 4, 9. And note these verses in Col. 2:1-3:

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:1-3).

See also 2 Tim. 1:3; Philemon 3, 4.

These verses leave no doubt but that the Apostle Paul prayed constantly, and that he prayed for many people. With all of the traveling that he did, all of the preaching, yet his epistles give abundant evidence that prayer was a way of life with him.

But let us go on to see in Paul's epistles that he taught believers to pray.

### III. THE APOSTLE PAUL AS ONE WHO TAUGHT BELIEVERS TO PRAY CONTINUALLY.

In this regard I think of 1 Thess. 5:17, 18; Eph. 5:20; 6:18; Phil. 4:6, 7; Col. 4:2.

Finally, let me mention another way in which see Paul as a man of prayer.

### IV. THE APOSTLE PAUL CONTINUALLY ASKED OTHERS TO PRAY FOR HIM AND HIS FELLOW-WORKERS.

We are inclined to think of a person we call a man of prayer as a person who prayed for others, but who may not have needed their prayers as much as they needed his prayers. But the epistles of Paul show us that that was not the case. Paul again and again requested that the people of God pray for him.

We all need to pray, and to pray continually, day after day. But we all need others to pray for us. While I do not profess to know all that the Lord had in mind when He took Peter and James and John into the Garden of Gethsemane, asking them to watch and to pray, there is the possibility that even He, as He approached the Cross, asked His disciples to pray for Him--to watch with Him.

Cf. Rom. 15:30-32:

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;  
That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;  
That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.

Then notice what Paul wrote in Eph. 6:19-20:

And for me, that utterance may be given unto me,

that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known  
the mystery of the gospel,  
For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that  
therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Let me conclude with two verses from the Thessalonian epistles. First, 1 Thess. 5:25: "Brethren, pray for us." And then 2 Thess. 3:1-2:

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:  
And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

As much as Paul must have prayed for himself. And he is the one who wrote to the Roman believers that Christ is our Intercessor, and that the Holy Spirit also prays for us, yet he earnestly and continually sought the prayers of believers everywhere!

Concl: Now, having seen all of these passages, what are we going to do about them?

If we are going to be obedient to the Word of God, we need to give ourselves to prayer, giving as much time as we can to prayer, and constantly lifting our hearts to the Lord in prayer throughout the day in thanksgiving and worship, bringing our needs to the Lord, interceding for others, having fellowship with the Lord. And this needs to be done continually. Prayer needs to have a major place in our lives too.

But remember that we, like the Apostle Paul, need to ask and encourage others to pray for us. Ask the Lord to place you on people's hearts so that they will be faithful in praying for you.

I trust that during these weeks that we will be considering together the prayers of the Apostle Paul, that the Lord will not only teach us more about what real prayer is, but that we will be deepened and strengthened in our fellowship with the Lord, that we will pray more for others, and trust that we will have many more who will pray faithfully for us. The Lord's work is blessed as we see the importance of prayer, and really pray.

May it be said of each one of us, "Behold, he prayeth." Or, Behold, she prayeth. We miss many blessings because we don't pray more than we do.

## A PRAYER FOR GOD'S ELECT PEOPLE

1 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Intro: Last week I started a series of messages on The Prayers of the Apostle Paul. We looked at the ninth chapter of Acts which records for us the time when Saul of Tarsus, later to become the Apostle Paul, was saved. And we noted that one of the first comments that was made about Saul after he was saved, was this: "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). This is what the Lord said about him, and so we know that it was true, and that he was really praying, not just saying prayers. And I hope you know that there is a difference. From his epistles we can see that what he began to do at that time in his life, he never stopped! He became a great apostle. He has given us at least 13 of the books of the NT. He was a superb teacher, and a zealous preacher. He probably did as much or more than anyone else to spread the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. But if we did not mention that he was a man of prayer, our picture of the Apostle Paul would be seriously incomplete. He was strong in the Word, and he was strong in prayer--a combination which ought to be an example to everyone who has ever been called in a special way to serve the Lord.

Paul not only teaches us the importance of prayer, and how to pray--that is, what we should pray for--but he teaches us that we need to tell people that we are praying for them, if we really are. In addition, his recorded prayers tell us that it is even good to let people know the requests that we are bringing to the Lord for them. I don't think that Paul would tell us that we always need to mention the requests, but his letters certainly indicate that there many times when we should.

We, the Lord's people, are weak in many ways, but it is most often the case that we are the weakest in prayer. The Apostle Paul has left a testimony with us in his epistles that prayer is where we ought to be the strongest. He taught that we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). That means that we should not only have times of private prayer when each of us is with the Lord, but we should live prayerful lives! I hope the time we spend considering the prayers of the Apostle Paul, will not only give us rich instruction in what true prayer is, but that the Holy Spirit will use our studies to pray more in the days to come than we have in the past.

Those of you who were here last Sunday will remember, I hope, that I said I would take up these prayers in a chronological order, rather than the order in which they come in the New Testament. In this way we can trace the development of



Paul's relationship with the Lord because his prayers reveal where he was in his fellowship with the Lord. The same is true of our prayers.

So we will be starting with 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Then we will go back to get Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. After that we will take up Paul's Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Then we will take up his pastoral epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. Then I am going to add on the book of Hebrews at the end on the possibility that Paul wrote that book too.

So his epistles, if we include Hebrews, can be divided into five groups. I do not say that I will follow the same order in each group as I have given them to you, but I will be going from one group to another as the Lord gives me the wisdom and the physical strength to do it. So, as with all things, I must say, the Lord willing.

Today I want to take you to the first prayer in the first epistle Paul wrote which in the providence of God was to be included in our Bibles. You will find it in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1, the first four verses. Actually we can say that there are two prayers here: a prayer that God would bless them with grace and peace, followed by a prayer of thanksgiving to God for them.

Let us consider first:

# I. HIS PRAYER FOR GRACE AND PEACE (1 Thess. 1:1).

You will find this prayer in all thirteen of the epistles which are attributed to the Apostle Paul.

But it is not a prayer that is limited to Paul. Peter used it in both of his epistles, John used it in 2 John and also in the book of the Revelation.

Some have question whether or not this is a prayer, saying that it is just a greeting (as it certainly was), or the expression of a hope (and we can say it was that too), but just as when we say to a person, "The Lord bless you," it ought to be an expression of our prayer for that person, so I don't see how we can consider the statement at the end of verse 1 in our text anything but a prayer. The world can wish, but those of us who know the Lord can do more than wish; WE CAN PRAY! So I am going to consider this as Paul's prayer for the believers at Thessalonica. And it is interesting to me that right to the end of his life, Paul prayed this prayer for the people of God--adding "mercy" to this prayer when he prayed for Timothy and Titus.

William Hendriksen said in his commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians that Paul used the word grace "about a hundred times in his thirteen epistles" (p. 42), and that he used the word peace "more than forty times" (p. 43).

— We know that these were the customary greetings of the Greeks and the Jews, grace for the Gentiles, and peace for the Jews. And when these groups used these words they were wishing the person to whom they were speaking the supply of every need and the addition of every blessing that would make their lives full and enjoyable. As believers began to use this when they greeted each other, they were combining all that any Gentile or Jew might include when they used this word, only for them the emphasis was predominantly spiritual! And what to unregenerate people could only be a wish, for believers became both a greeting and a prayer.

Let me be a little more specific about its meaning.

— "Grace" speaks of the favor of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ upon a believer. It would include deliverance from the power of sin, plus the God-given ability to live a holy life. Included in the grace of God for believers is the strength to face the trials of life as well as the temptations which are placed before us by our own flesh, the world, and the Devil. Paul declared to the Corinthian church, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). In speaking of his work, he said also to the Corinthians, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation..." (1 Cor. 3:10). When Paul, in his letter to the Galatian churches, was reporting about his meeting with James, Peter, and John, he said, with regard to his ministry to the Gentiles, that they "perceived the grace that was given unto" him (Gal. 2:9).

It is by God's grace we were saved, and it is by God's grace that we live. It is by God's grace that we have been saved from the penalty of our sins, and it is by God's grace that we are saved from the power of our sins. It is by God's grace that we grow. There is not a part of our lives where we have not been touched and blessed by the grace of God, and as long as we live we are going to need fresh supplies of His grace. All that God does for us, and all that He does in us, and all that He does through us, is traceable to the grace of God. When Paul said, "Grace be unto you," he left nothing unsaid that was needed for the spiritual blessing of the people of God.

— What about "peace"?

Someone, and I don't remember who is was, once said that

peace is the fruit of which grace is the root. That is just one way of saying that as we experience the grace of God in our lives, so will we be experiencing the peace of God. It is that inner quietness of heart which comes when we really know that God is in control of our lives, that He is sufficient for every need we have, and that He is always with us. Haven't those of us who are parents gone out for an evening, leaving our children with a babysitter with whom they were not well acquainted, and have come back home to find a child still awake, and possibly crying. But when we get home, that child goes to sleep without any trouble. That is peace.

Peace is resting in the Lord. When we were saved we had peace with God; but every day we live we need the peace of God--a peace resulting from the closest possible fellowship with the Lord.

And look! These are not a kind of grace and peace that somehow we are able to produce for ourselves. Paul was speaking about "grace...and peace" which come "from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." So in both cases the supply is inexhaustible. Jerry Bridges would tell us if he were speaking on this verse that the word grace is used to make us understand that these blessings from God are not dependent upon our performance. We want to please God, and we seek to please Him, but even when we sin, or when we fail, we can be assured of God's blessing when we turn to Him because He always deals with us on the basis of grace.

What a prayer this is! It is not wonder that Paul always used it. Believers always have two basic needs: the need for grace and its accompanying blessing of peace. If we have grace, then we have peace. But don't look for peace apart from the grace of God and of Christ.

But let us go on to the second part, a second prayer.

## II. A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (1 Thess. 1:2-4).

There is one thing I want to tell you as we begin looking at the prayers of the Apostle Paul. Be ready for many prayers of thanksgiving. This is the first, but it won't be the last. In fact, we are not going to get out of 1 Thessalonians before we will come on another. I will let you find it.

I am indebted to Dr. Hendriksen for pointing out to me that there is one main verb in these three verses, and that verb is followed by three participles which modify the verb. You can easily see what he meant just by reading these verses:  
 "We give thanks to God always for you,  
 1) "Making mention...;

- 2) "Remembering...;
- 3) "Knowing...."

Now notice that Paul's thanksgiving was directed to God, not to the Thessalonians. And notice also that he never prayed for them without thanking God for them. And, thirdly, notice his thanksgiving included all of them.

As I was thinking about what I have just said to you, I asked myself some questions which I want to ask you today. I asked myself if I always thank God when I pray for the believers I pray for. And then I asked myself another question: Do I thank God for all of the believers I pray for, or just some of them? Paul said that he thanked God always for all of them! It's not easy to thank the Lord for some people. But that should be our goal even if we have to thank the Lord for saving them so that they are not as bad as they might otherwise be.

Notice another thing about verse 2. Paul said, "Making mention of you in our prayers." Doesn't this tell us that Paul mentioned people by name in his prayers--wherever it was possible for him to do so. His prayers were personal. It would be good for all of us to go through our church roster just to thank the Lord for each person, one by one, on our list.

But I must go on. What was it about the believers in Thessalonica that encouraged Paul to pray for them? Three things:

- 1) "Your work of faith,
- 2) "And labour of love,
- 3) "And patience of hope..."

These are three characteristics which help us to identify true believers from those who profess to be saved, but do not really possess salvation.

Notice we have here faith, hope, and love.

Let me remind you that often words in the Bible have a different meaning from that which we give to them in our daily use of them. When we think of "work" for a Christian, we think of doing something in church, or witnessing, or something which could be termed Christian service. But that is not the case here. "Work" speaks of activity of any kind. It really includes everything that is included in your life day by day. Paul saw that the lives which the Thessalonian believers lived was characterized through and through, as we would say, by a strong confidence in the Lord. They lived lives which expressed their faith. They were trusting the Lord in everything that they did.

The work "labour" adds to that the fact that they were prompted by love so that in spite of the difficulties, or how long they might need to do something, love motivated them to continue--their love for God, and their love especially for the people of God. But it would even include the people of the world, for example, an unsaved relative, should the need arise. Paul had such a love for the Lord Jesus Christ that he counted no labor too difficult, nor any risk too dangerous. And if you would ask why he was continually willing to face even death itself in his labor, the answer could be found in his love for the Lord.

"Patience of hope" has to do not only with waiting, but persevering while you wait. A good place to look for "patience of hope" is when praying for someone or something over a period of time without any visible evidence that God is doing anything to answer your prayer. And will you notice that it is not "hope" in our prayers, nor "hope" in our labors, nor "hope" in our ability, but "patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." And to this he added, "In the sight [or, in the presence] of God and our Father." Since this epistle has so much teaching concerning the coming of the Lord, it may be that Paul was saying that the believers in Thessalonica were persevering under trials even though they knew that they might not find relief or the reward for their labors until they stood in the very presence of God in heaven.

Paul's thanksgiving to God was not because people had professed faith in Christ, but because day by day there was evidence that God had done a work in their hearts. They were different, and it could be seen in the way they lived. And primarily he was speaking of faith, love, and perseverance--not that they were just fulfilling their responsibility, but that their labors could not be in vain in the Lord.

The remainder of chapter 1 may give us a clearer idea of the reason for Paul's continued thanksgiving.

But notice how this part of the chapter concludes: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

The elect are not marked in any way before they are saved. We don't know when we proclaim the Gospel who is going to be saved, and who will not be saved. But when we see the evidence which Paul saw in the lives of the Thessalonians who had believed in their heart, he knew that ultimately the cause for their salvation was traceable to God's sovereign choice of them, not their choice of Christ.

This is why Paul thanked God. God had sovereignly chosen in

pure grace all who were being saved. He did not choose them because he saw something good in them. He did not choose them because he saw that they would be receptive to the Gospel. He sees no good in any of us. We are totally useless and unprofitable to God. He, by the miracle of His grace and for reasons known only to Himself, has chosen those who are being saved--and all of the glory belongs to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so let me point this out: our understanding of the doctrine of election is going to have a direct bearing upon the frequency and the depth of our thanksgiving to God as we pray for each other. If we reject that truth, we have to give some of the credit for man's salvation to man. But if we see that God chooses, God calls, God saves, God keeps, and God glorifies, then we will see how, even by praising God day after day, we can never really give Him all of the thanksgiving which He alone deserves for our salvation.

Concl: Let me point out one more detail about these verses which we must not miss. It has to do with the way that Paul spoke of God, and the way he spoke of Christ.

Three times Paul spoke in these verse of God as "the Father," or as "our Father." (Read.) And three times he referred to our Lord as "the Lord Jesus Christ, or as "our Lord Jesus Christ." (Read.)

How wonderful it is for us to be able to speak of God as "our Father." And it is equally wonderful that we can speak of His Son as "our Lord Jesus Christ." It is by His grace that we are members of the redeemed family of God, making God our Father, chosen and sought and redeemed, and yet only because of what "our Lord Jesus Christ" did for us when in perfect grace He took the penalty which we deserved, and satisfied every requirement of a righteous God.

I recently said that every Sunday is for us a commemoration of the resurrection of our Savior. I say today that every day ought to be thanksgiving for those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. We need to thank Him for what He has done for us personally, but also for what He has done for others we know who belong to Him as we do.

Let us praise him continually now so that later we won't have to regret that we didn't praise Him more.

Chosen not for good in me, Wakened up from wrath to flee,  
Hidden in the Saviour's side, By the Spirit sanctified,  
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,  
By my love, how much I owe. --R. M. McCheyne.

## AN APOSTLE'S UNCEASING PRAISE

1 Thessalonians 2:13

Intro: As we come to a second prayer of the Apostle Paul, I ask you to turn to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2. Verse 13 is my text. This, as you can see, is a prayer of thanksgiving.

The prayer we considered last week was also a prayer of thanksgiving prompted by the confirmation Paul had seen, or heard of, that a work of salvation had been done by God in the hearts of many Thessalonians. The report which Luke gave in the book of Acts after Paul preached that Jesus was the Messiah, was this:

And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few (Acts 17:4).

The words, "some of them" refers to Jews because Paul was preaching in the synagogue in Thessalonica. And Paul was moved "always" to thank God for them when he remembered their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." That was the prayer of thanksgiving in chapter 1.

This prayer in chapter 2 was just as constant, and just as joyful, but the reason is different. We might say that what Paul thanked God for in this verse is what brought about the results which Paul mentioned in chapter 1. What was Paul thanking God for in chapter 2, verse 13?

# I. THE REASON FOR PAUL'S THANKSGIVING.

It was not just that they had received the Word of God, but that they had received it, not as they might have, and surely as others received it--"as the word of men"--"but as it is in truth **the Word of God.**" That is, as it is translated in the NASB, "but for what it really is," or as it is rendered in the NIV, "but as it actually is"--"**the Word of God!**"

Paul was indicating here that he had seen the Word of God accepted in two different ways, "as the word of men," or, "as it is in truth, the Word of God." One was the wrong way; the other was the right way. The one way had no effect on the people who received it; the other brought not only life-changing results, but eternal results! The people who received the Word as the word of men, could easily cast it aside and forget all about it. But the people who received it as the Word of God could never forget it. To them, God had spoken. The power of the Word of God changed their previous ideas about religion and about God, and for the

first time in their lives they realized that they were hearing the truth. Although the people had not known the Apostle Paul nor Silas before, the Spirit of God convinced them that at last they were hearing the truth.

From the Scriptures they had learned that Jesus of Nazareth was really the long-awaited Messiah, **and they believed**--some Jews, a large number of Gentiles, and many of "the chief women." The probable meaning of the reference to "the chief women" was that among the Jewish and Gentile women who were saved, were the most prominent, the most influential, the most important women in the city of Thessalonica. Paul later wrote to the Corinthians telling them that when God calls people to salvation, He doesn't call many who are wise, or might, or noble, but evidently in Thessalonica there was a real response in the hearts of women in the higher ranks of Thessalonian society.

But we need to notice that Paul did not commend the people who had been saved. Instead, he offered his thanks to God, and he did this continually. He knew, and undoubtedly Silas knew, that what had taken place in Thessalonica was a work of God! God had used Paul's exposition of the Word of God to convince the people who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and Savior. If God had not been at work, no one would have believed! And that is always true. People can easily be impressed by the teaching of the Word, but it is only those who receive it as the Word of God who profit from its message.

But what does it mean that they "received it...as the word of God?" It means that they believed the Gospel (because that is what Paul was preaching to them), and that they were saved. What they had been working for as a reward (by attending the synagogue, etc.) they learned was a gift. They received the forgiveness of their sins. They received eternal life. They had truly become the people of God. And Paul had thanked God continually for the changes that had taken place in the lives of many people. He thanked God because it was what God had done. He took none of the credit for himself. He took none for Silas. He did not give the people credit because they believed. He gave all of the thanks, all of the glory, to God--and to Him alone it belonged!

It would be impossible to say what their convictions were before about the Scriptures. They undoubtedly felt that God had something to do with it. But never before had they seen that it was all, from start to finish, the Word of God! And it was what the scriptures had to say about the Messiah, that convinced them not only that Jesus was the Messiah, but that a book which gave such a verbal portrait of Jesus of Nazareth



had to be the Word of God.

When Trinity Bible Church began, one of the things the elders had to do was to formulate a Statement of Faith. We worked on it for many weeks. We wanted it to state what the Word of God teaches, and so it was our intent that our Statement of Faith would always be subject to the teaching of Scripture. We felt that if God gave us a greater understanding of Scripture so that our Statement of Faith was not as accurate as it could be, we would change our Statement of Faith, always giving first place to the Word of God. So far we have seen no reason to change anything that was our understanding of Scripture at that time.

Article I in our Statement of Faith says this:

We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original manuscripts, infallible, the sole authority on matters of faith and holiness.

We ask people who want to become a part of this ministry to be able to answer four questions affirmatively. I will just give you the first of the four. It is this:

Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

Those people in Thessalonica, who were saved under the ministry of Paul and Silas, would have had no trouble with our Statement of Faith. That is the foundational truth of the Christian Faith. We are a people of one Book, the Bible. We believe that "men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," as the Apostle Peter said. Cf. 2 Pet. 1:21. And we believe this applies to all of the Bible, and only to the sixty-six books of the Bible.

The Thessalonians did not have all that we have. The Bible was not completed until the end of the first century, and it was later that it was compiled into one book. But the point that I am concerned about for all of us today is this: How deep, how strong, is our conviction that the Bible is, as Paul said, really the Word of God? Those Thessalonians who believed had to suffer for it. There was a price to be paid by way of persecution because the message of the Bible has never been popular in the world. But if you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and not the word of men, then you are going to want your life to follow the teaching of this Book. You are not going to be able to leave it alone. You are going to want to read it. You are going to want to be taught what it means. Nobody will ever be able to convince

you to give it up, or make you believe that it is not the Word of God. You wouldn't believe it is the Word of God if God had not done in your heart what He did in the hearts of those Thessalonian people almost two thousand years ago. My parents taught me the Scriptures, but it was God Who took their teaching and convinced me that it was His Word. I had SS teachers who taught me the Word of God, but God used their teaching to show me that the Bible is His Word. God uses human instruments, but He is the One Who does the work. And so He gets the praise!

Let me suggest this: Right where you sit today, or whenever you can get to a place where it is comfortable for you to do so, will you lift your heart in thanksgiving to God that He has caused you to understand that this Book is truly His Book? Perhaps at your dinner table today the one who prays before you eat could lead your family or whatever group you are in, in a prayer of thanksgiving that you know and believe the Bible to be the Word of God. Surely when you read your Bible by yourself, you should take the Bible in hand and say, "Thank you, heavenly Father, that you have shown me that this is your Word, the Word of God."

How that thrilled the heart of the Apostle Paul! He went to a heathen city, and God worked through His teaching of the Scriptures to convince people that the Scriptures were His Word, and that Jesus Christ was His Son, the Savior of sinners.

But let me make another point, and I will state it in the form of a question:

## II. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BELIEVE THAT THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD?

What does our text say? Note the last statement of the verse: "Which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Have you ever heard the expression, THE WORK OF THE WORD? Let me say something at this point which I hope none of us will ever forget. It is this: Everything that God does in us, in our hearts, He does through His Word. And, as our text says, when God works in us through His Word, He does it "effectually." Actually the words "effectually worketh" are the translation of one verb in the Greek. The NASB translates it, "performs its work." The NKJV says, "effectively works."

Let me go back to those wonderful verses in Isaiah 55 which you have heard many times from this pulpit:

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from

heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

**So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it**  
(Isa. 55:10-11).

God always works through His Word. It was through Paul's teaching of the Scriptures that those Jewish people and Gentile proselytes were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. We are born again by the Word of God. See 1 Pet. 1:23. We grow through the Word. See 1 Pet. 2:2, 3. Another way of saying the same thing: We are sanctified by the Word; that is, we are made holy. Cf. John 17:17. We are instructed through the Word. The Word of God has been the delight of the people of God throughout history, down to the present hour. Cf. Job 23:12; Psalms 119:97; Jeremiah 15:16.

But now let me tie this in with the two verses which immediately precede our text in 1 Thessalonians 2. I am speaking of verses 11, 12. (Read.)

And then notice the first four words of verse 13: **"For this cause also..."** What did Paul mean when he said, "For this cause also"? He meant that it would be meaningless to exhort them to "walk worthy of God" if they did not believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

In the first place they would not know what kind of a walk, or life, that was. And in the second place they would not have the power to live such a life. The Bible is not just a book of truth, of divine truth, but it is a book of power! This is brought out in another prayer the Apostle Paul prayed many times, found in Colossians 1, verses 9 through 12:

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (Col. 1:9-12).

Paul was so thankful that God had taught those believers in

Thessalonica that the Scriptures were the Word of God because it was through the Word that they could learn what a holy life is, and find also the power to live it.

"Worthy of God" — How amazing that the Apostle Paul would suggest that such a life is possible for us! How would you possibly describe such a life? Whatever it is, Paul was certainly teaching us here that such a life would be out of our reach if we did not believe the Bible to be the Word of God. The passage in Colossians 1 which I just read to you tells us that a life pleasing to God is a life in which our primary purpose is to please the Lord in all that we do, all that we are, all that we say, and even all that we think. Where are we going to find out what all of that is? In the Word. And where are we going to get the desire and the power to live such a life? Cf. Phil. 2:12, 13,

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed,  
not as in my presence only, but now much more in  
my absence, work out your own salvation with fear  
and trembling.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will  
and to do of his good pleasure.

And how does He work in us? Through His Word and by the Holy Spirit. But none of this would be possible if we did not believe that the Bible is really the Word of God--unchanging, infallible, and mighty.

Concl: Do you see how thankful you and I should be that we believe the Bible is the Word of God? This is no insignificant thing! It is a belief which God has given us. We don't need a lot of apologetics to convince us. In fact, apologetics without the work of God will still leave us questioning whether or not the Bible is really the Word of God. But when God teaches us that the Bible is His Word, no one could ever convince us otherwise. If you have questions about the Word, ask the Lord to show you what He taught those Thessalonian believers, and what He has taught every person who has ever really believed the Bible to be the Word of God.

It may be that some of us here today who believe that the Bible is truly the Word of God, have never thanked the Lord for the faith He has given us. If so, let us begin today to thank the Lord for the understanding He has given us. And let us not just thank the Lord for ourselves, but as we pray for family members who share our faith, and other believers we know, our fellow-saints here at Trinity, let us do the same. God has been most gracious in making this known to us. This is the foundation of everything else that the Lord has done for us in meeting our spiritual needs and all that He will have done for us when we come "unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12). And let such praise be daily.

A PRAYER FOR PERFECTED FAITH  
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Intro: The epistles of Paul show that he was a tireless worker in the service of the Lord. He would spare no effort in carrying the Gospel to people where Christ was not known. In fact, this was the burden of his ministry as he told the church at Rome.

Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation (Rom. 15:20).

However, this was not all that he did. After the Gospel entered a city and people were saved and a church established, he longed to get back to them to help them in their walk with the Lord. That was the case with Thessalonica.

And yet it is important for us to notice that Paul never took the credit for the work that he did. He knew that God was the One Who was actually doing the work, and so to God He was continually giving thanks. In our study of his prayers in this epistle we have noticed that his first two prayers were prayers of thanksgiving, and although this third prayer leads into intercession, yet it, too, begins with thanksgiving.

All of this is consistent with what the apostle said in chapter 5, verse 18. (Read.) We give thanks to God because God's hand is to be seen in every blessing that we receive. And it is important for us to see that this is "the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." It seems that nothing pleases the Lord more than for us to recognize the good things that He does for us, and then to give Him the praise for it all. We have many OT passages which emphasize the importance of praising God. For example, listen to the Word of God through Asaph in Psa. 50:23:

Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him  
that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew  
the salvation of God.

However, when we take seriously our responsibility to praise the Lord, we run into the kind of a problem which Paul expressed as a question in verse 9 of our text. Let us call it:

I. PAUL'S DILEMMA (1 Thess. 3:9).

The idea in verse 9 is this: God has blessed us (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) with such great joy through our ministry to you, how can we possibly return to Him in full the praise which He so richly deserves.

The NIV render verse 9 this way:

How can we thank God enough for you in return for  
all the joy we have in the presence of our God  
because of you?

Haven't you ever felt this way when you are trying to thank somebody for something good that they have done for you. I don't know how many times during my life I have written a letter to thank somebody for something they have done for me, or given to me, and I have started out by saying something like this: "I can't find the right words to express how grateful I am for what you have done for me." And then when I have finished, I always have the feeling that I have failed to express my gratitude sufficiently.

This is how Paul felt about the thanksgiving that he was giving to the Lord. What words could adequately express the thanksgiving and joy that were in his heart over what He had done in the hearts of many in Thessalonica. This is a joy which only those who have someone else to Christ, can possibly feel. We can't save anyone. We can't make people see their need of a Savior. We can't make others realize that they are sinners in God's sight, and what it means that they are under divine judgment. Only God can do these things. But the amazing thing about the Lord's work is that He chooses to work through us! What we need to remember is that He does the work, and He gets all of the glory. Paul grasped for words when he tried to tell God how thankful he was for what He had done in the hearts of the people in Thessalonica who had been saved. And since he said "we" in this verse, he meant that Silas and Timothy had the same problem. They were overjoyed at what God had done, and their chief dilemma at this point was finding words to thank God sufficiently.

It seems that the question mark belongs at the end of verse 9 instead of at the end of verse 10.

In verse 10 we see:

## II. PAUL'S PETITION (1 Thess. 3:10).

I am using the word petition here to indicate the request that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were presenting to the Lord for themselves! William Hendriksen said in his commentary on this verse,

But even though Paul is still struggling with the problem how to make an adequate return for blessings already received, this does not deter him from asking for still more (p. 89).

"Night and day" does not mean morning and evening, but it

means a burden which rested continually upon their hearts. The word "praying" (a different word for prayer) suggests a lack which these three men felt in their own hearts with regard to the believers in Thessalonica. "Exceedingly" expresses fervency.

So, with all of the other things these men were doing, this was a burden that they were continually expressing to the Lord. And we can see how vital it was to their joy in the Lord by what Paul had written in verse 8 of this chapter. (Read.)

Paul and Silas and Timothy were not the kind of men who could go to a certain place, and then move on without giving those people another thought. Whenever they were used to bring people to Christ, they prayed for them, and looked forward to getting back with them again.

But why did these three men want to get back to Thessalonica? It was that they "might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." And what did Paul have in mind when he used the words, "your faith"?

Well, by their "faith" he included everything that had to do with their relationship with the Lord. From the epistle itself, it would seem that Paul had in mind three things:

- 1) Their understanding of the truth of God. We know that they were confused about the coming of the Lord; Paul was writing about that problem which they had, but he felt that he needed to get back with them where he could see them face to face. Notice the expression, "see your face."
- 2) Their obedience to the will of God. In this area of their faith they needed both to understand what the will of God was, and then to do it.
- 3) Finally, they needed to be encouraged to trust the Lord. After all, we walk by faith, not by sight. God rarely answers our prayers immediately. Therefore, we need to keep trusting while we keep praying.

Perhaps this is what made Epaphras pray so fervently for the believers at Colosse. Do you remember what Paul said about him? Cf. Col. 4:12:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

No church is doing so well but what it can do better. And the same can be said of everyone of us individually. We all need to improve, to grow in our faith. We all need to know

the Word better than we do. We all need to be more obedient to the Word of God. And we all need to trust the Lord more than we do. Where Paul saw that God was blessing, he prayed for greater blessing. That is the way it should be with all of us. The Lord's work will not be finished in us until we get to heaven. And so our faith needs to be perfected more and more until that day arrives.

It seems from what the Apostle Paul said here that he sought to make every contact with the Lord's people to count for their edification, whether he was writing to them, or actually present with them.

But not let us look at:

### III. PAUL'S REQUESTS FOR THE CHURCH (1 Thess. 3:11-13).

You can see in verse 11 that his request for the church included a request for himself and his co-workers. Then in verse 12 we see what Paul's concern was for the church. And lastly in verse 13 the result that Paul desired.

It is apparent that as much as Paul wanted to get back to Thessalonica, he did not want to go until it was the Lord's time for them to go. (See verse 11.) Paul teaches us by his prayer that it is not only good to do the right thing, but we must await the Lord's time. His guidance in our lives is for our own edification--as it was for Paul, Silas, and Timothy. And it is clear from verse 11 that Paul believed that God Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ (Himself, understood) would make it very clear as to when it was time for these three men to go back to Thessalonica. The Lord's work needs to be done in His way, and in His time. Even when we are with people, there is a time when we should speak, and there are times when we need to be quiet, and wait, and pray.

This was even true with our Lord. Sometimes He spoke; sometimes He did not speak. Isaiah 50:4 was written primarily of our Lord, the Messiah. Notice the words carefully:

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how **to speak a word in season** to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

So Paul was asking the God and the Lord Jesus Christ to "direct our way unto you." This means that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were looking to the Lord to remove the mountains, straighten the roads, provide the means--making it very clear to them when they should get back to Thessalonica. This part of Paul's prayer shows the simplicity of his faith. He was



leaving every detail up to the Lord.

Verse 12 gives us the main request.

— There is a special emphasis which Paul made in the Greek text that is not as clear in the English. In verse 11 he was expressing his petition to the Lord for himself and those who were with him. Then in verse 12 he was saying, "But as for you..." That is, he was saying, "Whatever may be his will for us and our desire to come to you, we are asking Him to 'make you to increase..." And the idea is not that the Lord would do this when Paul got there, but even if they never got there!

Paul was praying that their love for each other, and for all others, would not only grow, but overflow! This is the kind of love that the Lord has for us, and it was the kind of love that Paul had for them. (See the last statement of verse 12.) The Lord loves us when we don't deserve to be loved. He loves us even when we test His patience to the limit. We can never go beyond the love of God to make Him stop loving us. Even when we have our differences, we need to continue to love one another.

Paul got back to this subject in 4:9, 10. (Read.)

— Cf. our Lord's words in John 13:34, 35:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Not only does the world recognize that we are the people of God by our love for each other, but it is this love which gives us assurance that we are really saved. Listen to 1 John 3:14:

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

— In our Lord's words in John 13, He spoke of loving continually, the need to keep on loving, and to love, as He said, "as I have loved you." This is the most powerful witness we have to a world that needs the Savior. And the more we love each other, the greater our testimony will be. And the greater will be our joy in the Lord. We may not always agree, but that must not keep us from truly loving each other.

All of us need to make a greater study of the love of God for us, and the love of Christ for us. Actually they are the

same. When Peter denied that he knew the Lord, there was never any question about the Lord's love for Peter. That remained the same. The question was about Peter's love for the Lord.

We are having some weddings in our Trinity family this summer --three to be exact. And one thing I always stress with prospective bridegrooms is that they are to love their wives "as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it." No husband has ever loved his wife that much. The standard has been set so high so we will know that we need to have our love "increase and abound. Perhaps we have lost sight of how wonderful the love of God is, and how wonderful it is that that love has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us. If so, let us pray that we will get concerned about it again, and that it will increase and abound in our lives more and more until the Lord comes, or until He takes us home.

But finally, why was Paul so concerned about the love that the Thessalonian believers needed to show for each other? We have our answer in verse 13. (Read.)

It is because it is by love that our hearts are strengthened ("stablish"), irreproachable, unblamable, in holiness "before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

You and I will never meet a truly holy person who is not a loving person. And it is only God and the Lord Jesus Christ who can make us to "increase and abound in love" so that whenever the Lord comes, or whenever He takes us home, we will be what our heavenly Father wants us to be, and what our Savior wants us to be. This is all that really matters.

Concl: One thing I hope we will learn in this series in which we are considering the prayers of the Apostle Paul, is that these prayers are not only to show us how Paul prayed, but to teach us more about what true prayer is. This prayer that Paul prayed for the saints in Thessalonica is an excellent prayer for us to pray for the saints in Trinity Bible Church. May our love for each other be what it should be "before God," and may our love extend to all other believers we know, even though we do not agree on every point of doctrine. We need to speak the truth, but we need to speak it in love. And someday the Lord will teach all of us the things that we have not known, or the things which we have not known perfectly. Until that day let us be faithful to the Word of God as we understand it, but never stop loving the Lord nor any of His people.

## A PRAYER FOR SANCTIFICATION

1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24

Intro: In our study of the book of Romans we learned that salvation is made up of three parts:

- 1) Justification.
- 2) Sanctification.
- 3) Glorification.

Justification is the same for every child of God. It speaks of our complete and eternal acceptance before God through the work of Christ on the Cross. There are no degrees in our justification. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation is fully justified, declared righteous, cleared of all charges against him (or her) because Christ has suffered the full penalty which should have fallen upon us. It is because we are justified before God that we have no fear of having to suffer eternal punishment. Paul declared this in Romans 5:8, 9:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that,  
while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.  
Much more then, being now justified by his blood,  
we shall be saved from wrath through him.

Our justification is not ours because we deserve it. In fact, we deserve to be judged eternally for our sins. No, our justification is based upon God Who loved us, and upon Christ Who died for us. We are "justified by his blood," that is, through His death for us on the Calvary's Cross.

Once we are justified, declared righteous by God, He will never reverse that verdict in our behalf. God has not overlooked our sin; its penalty has been fully paid in our behalf by the Lord Jesus Christ. All of us who are saved have the same justification. A person who might be saved today has the same justification as a person has who has been saved for fifty or sixty years. We have the same justification that Abraham had, or that David had, or that the Apostle Paul had.

Notice that Paul wrote in the verses I read to you from Romans 5 that we have this justification NOW! He said, "Being ~~now~~ justified by his blood." We have it now. There is no period of probation. All who are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation are justified now, and they can never lose it. This is what it means to be saved. All of us who are trusting Christ for our salvation fall under the great statement that Paul made in Romans 5:1, 2:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace  
with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:  
By whom also we have access by faith into this  
grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of

the glory of God.

And let us remember that there is only one way that anyone can possibly be justified, and that is through Christ. We are not justified by the good things that we do. We are not justified by any money that we might give to God. Our need was so great that nothing but the sacrifice of Christ for our sins could possibly satisfy the righteous demands of our holy God. And so what we could never do, Christ has done by His death on the Cross.

I not only hope that we all understand this, but I hope that we all are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for our justification before God.

But what is the ultimate goal of our salvation? It is glorification--justification, sanctification, glorification. What will it mean when we are glorified? It means that we will no longer be capable of sin because we will have become morally and spiritually like our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul said that we are predestined "to be conformed to the image of his Son," that is, God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find that in Romans 8:29. The Apostle John said that "we shall be like him," that is, like Christ, "for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). This is our hope--not something uncertain, but a hope guaranteed by the death of Christ for us. We all are going to be glorified. There may be some differences as to the degrees of our glorification, but our final state is certain.

Now we are ready for the subject of Paul's prayer which we want to consider today. That subject is sanctification. Sanctification stands between justification and glorification. Sanctification begins after we are justified; it is finished when we are glorified. And it is in sanctification that there can be a big difference among those of us who are the people of God. The difference depends upon the attention that we given to our sanctification.

We are considering the prayers of the Apostle Paul, and the prayer that we are going to consider today is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Here Paul was praying we would be sanctified "wholly," and he went on to explain, "and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The first point that I want to make with you is that:

# I. SANCTIFICATION IS A WORK OF GOD.

Paul indicated this two times in verse 23. He called upon

"the very God of peace" to sanctify them wholly, and then he went on to say that he was praying to God that He would preserve them blameless in body, soul, and spirit, "unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We ask God to do things for us because we can't do them without His help.

And then notice what Paul said in verse 24. (Read.) Now look at this verse very carefully. How are we to account for the fact that we are saved? It is because God called us to come to Christ. It is not that we figured out what our need was, and then came to Christ. No, He called us! He made us see that we were sinners in need of a Savior. He showed us that only Christ could save us. And so He called us to Christ, and we came, and He caused us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now our God Who called us is "faithful." That is, He started a work when He called us which He fully intends to finish. He is not going to abandon us anywhere along the line. He is faithful! What He set out to do for us and in us, He is going to finish. This whole work of salvation is too big for us. If it depended upon us, it would never get done. But we can really expect it to be done because God is doing it.

Up to this point I haven't really defined what sanctification is. Let me do that now.

## II. THE MEANING OF SANCTIFICATION.

To be sanctified means to be made holy. And since God is holy, to be sanctified is to be made like God.

This is not the first time that Paul has mentioned sanctification in this epistle.

In the prayer we considered last Sunday, there are several references to sanctification--if not the actual word, yet for sure, the meaning. When Paul in chapter 3, verse 10, spoke of perfecting their faith, he was thinking of their sanctification. When he spoke in verse 12 of seeing their love increase, he was thinking of sanctification. And surely when he spoke of want to see their hearts established "unblameable in holiness," that is sanctification. The words holy and sanctify are from the same root in the NT Greek.

Then look at chapter 4, verse 3. (Read.) And then read verse 7 in this same chapter.

Sanctification is a work of God in us which causes us to avoid sin, on the one hand, and to do what pleases God, on

the other. It is a work of God in which He changes us from what we were when we were first saved to be what He wants us to be as His children. This is godliness--not just godly habits, but godly character. Everything that God has to say in His Word about what we are to be and how we are to live is aimed at our sanctification. God saved us to make us holy people.

Now, from our text, let me point out what Paul had to say about:

### III. THE EXTENT OF OUR SANCTIFICATION.

How much of us is included in God's work of sanctification? Paul made this very clear in his prayer. And said, "And the very God of peace sanctify you **wholly**," and then he added, "And I pray God **your whole spirit and soul and body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What does this tell us? It tells us that God's work of sanctification extends to every part of our being--what we do, what we say, what we think, where we go, all that we are! There is no part of us that is excluded from this work that God is doing to make us a holy people. This sums up Paul's main concern for the believers in Thessalonica. This is why he wanted to get back to them. This was the burden of his prayer for them. He knew that God wanted them to be holy, and that is why he wanted them to be holy. This meant a complete change, an entire transformation in each one of their lives, from what they were when God called them to Himself and to Christ.

Now let us turn our attention to the words, "spirit and soul and body." These are the words which Paul used to describe a human being. We are "spirit and soul and body." There is no part of us which is not either spirit or soul or body. To state it another way, spirit plus soul plus body equals a human being. Angels cannot claim these three because they have no physical body. Animals, birds, and fish cannot claim all three because, as far as we know, they have no capacity for fellowship with God. Only human beings, of all of God's creatures, have spirit, soul, and body.

Theologians have two words they use to describe different views they have about the nature of man. They are the words dichotomist and trichotomist. Some feel that man is made up of two parts: a material part, called the body; and an immaterial part, called either the spirit or the soul. They are dichotomists. I am a trichotomist because, as the word suggests, I believe that there are three parts to man: his spirit, his soul, and his body. And I base my belief on this

verse. It is true that sometimes we find just the word soul used to describe the immaterial part of man (without any reference to his spirit), but I don't think that you would have a verse like this, and a prayer like Paul prayed, if we were not spirit and soul and body. But there are sincere Christians on both sides of this question. This is one of those cases where each of us needs to be fully persuaded in our own minds.

It is not a simple thing to try to define the difference between the spirit and the soul, and I certainly don't claim to have the final answer on this. All I can do is to tell you what I think the difference is. When we get to heaven, then we will all know for sure. We all agree about what we have in mind when we speak of the body. And we all must agree as well that when Paul spoke of sanctification applying to spirit and soul and body, he wasn't leaving anything out. When we are finally glorified, our glorification will include our bodies, our souls, and our spirits--our whole being!

I think we would all have to agree that there is a close relationship between the soul and the spirit. All parts of our being work in conjunction with each other. But we do know that there are people in the world who do not have God in their thoughts. They are not concerned about pleasing God. They are not interested in fellowship with God. They do not believe they are accountable to God. The Bible speaks of them as "dead in trespasses and in sins." When a person is saved, all of that is changed. Then he does want to please God. He is interested in fellowship with God. He knows that he is accountable to God. He has become a new creature in Christ. Personally, I believe that it was primarily in man's spirit that he was affected by original sin. That it is in man's spirit that he is capable to fellowship with God.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 when Paul was speaking to the Corinthian believers about their bodies being the temple of the Holy Spirit (Who comes to indwell us when we are saved), he went on to tell them that they were to glorify God in their bodies and in their spirits which are God's. I know that this could be one of those passages where he was saying that we need to glorify God outwardly (with out bodies) and inwardly (in our spirits), but it seems to me that we have a basis for saying here that it is primarily in our spirits that we have fellowship with God, and that it is mainly in our spirits that we experience eternal life when we are saved.

Anyway, grant me this: That holiness of life has to do, first of all, with our relationship with God. And this may

be the reason that Paul put "spirit" first, because it has to do with our relationship with God.

If this is the case, then "soul" would have to do with our personal behavior and in our relationship with each other. Perhaps the spirit and soul together have to do with our ability to think, our emotions, the exercise of our wills, and so on. After Adam and Eve sinned, they still could think, they showed emotion, and made decisions. And that continues on today with people who do not know the Lord. But it is all depraved, far different from what God wants it to be. And that is not changed until a person is saved.

Finally, the body. Romans 12:1, 2 speaks very clearly about the body. In fact, right here in 1 Thessalonians Paul spoke about the body. See chapter 3, verse 3 through 8.

We know from Phil. 3:20, 21 that these bodies of ours are to be made like our Lord's body as it was when He came out of the tomb.

So it behooves every one of us to give constant thought to our progress in holiness in every part of our being. We often congratulate ourselves when we don't say what we feel, but we forget that God knows how we feel, and what we would say if we really expressed our feelings.

Let me point this out: When Paul addressed God as "the very God of peace," he was indicating that when God blesses us with peace, all of the parts of our being are operating in harmony with each other, and in accord with the will of God. How wonderful it is going to be for us when the Lord comes and this work of sanctification in each one of us is completed!

But let me raise a question in conclusion which is not a part of our text, but which we need to understand. It is this:

#### IV. DO WE HAVE A PART IN OUR SANCTIFICATION?

Paul was asking God to sanctify the Thessalonian believers. And he assured those same Thessalonians that God was faithful, and that He would do it. Does it mean that we have no responsibility in this? Is there nothing for us to do?

If there were nothing for us to do, Paul would never have written this epistle, and a second epistle. We are responsible for ourselves. We do need to be obedient to the Word. We do need to avoid sin in all of its forms. See 5:22. We do need to be careful about our speech, and about our thoughts. We need to be careful about where we go, about



what we look at, about what we read, about the relationships which we establish with people. Solomon said,

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.

Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.

Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.

Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil (Prov. 4:23-27).

But we can't do all that we need to do on our own. We need the Lord's help. That is why we need to pray. That is why we need to keep reading the Word, and seeking by God's grace to obey it. That is why we need to check ourselves when we know we are being tempted to do, or say, or even think, the wrong thing.

Concl: THE WORK OF SANCTIFICATION WILL NOT BE FINISHED FOR ANY OF US UNTIL THE LORD COMES, OR UNTIL HE TAKES US HOME TO HEAVEN. Our justification is settled forever if we are trusting Christ for our salvation. If we know the Lord in salvation, our ultimate glorification is also certain. But it is our sanctification that we need to be concerned about, the holiness of our lives, our growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let us pray for ourselves and for each other as Paul prayed for the Thessalonian church. And let us daily seek His grace that we may be, and do, and say, and think that which is going to please and glorify our wonderful heavenly Father and our precious Savior who died to save us from our sins.

A PLEA FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S GOODNESS  
2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12

Intro: We began our study of the prayers of the Apostle Paul by looking at his prayers in 1 Thessalonians--which was the first epistle which Paul wrote. Today we are moving into the second epistle which he wrote: 2 Thessalonians.

I am not going to deal with his prayer of thanksgiving in verse 3 because we had prayers similar to that in 1 Thessalonians. But I do want to point it out to you and mention that it seems that the Lord had continued to answer Paul's prayers for that church. See verse 3. Their faith was growing and their love for each other was abounding. And Paul felt a deep obligation to give thanks to the Lord because He was the only One Who could have prospered the work the way it was going.

However, the fourth verse indicates that along with the spiritual growth, persecutions and trials had continued, and Paul was thankful that their growth had continued in spite of the difficulties they were facing. And he was writing to assure them when the Lord returned, He would do two things:

- 1) He would judge those who did not know Him.
- 2) He was coming to be glorified in His saints" (v. 10).  
And it was for this that God was preparing them.

The first word of the prayer in verse 11 shows that what he had been saying the in first ten verses prompted the prayer that is recorded for us in verses 11 and 12. And the words he used to introduce his prayer show:

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRAYER (2 Thess. 1:11a).

I am referring to the words which Paul often used to introduce his prayers: "Wherefore also we pray always for you."

The word "always" shows not only the importance of prayer, but the importance of this prayer! Our prayers for people may vary from day to day, but if there is something that we pray for certain people all of the time, this means that we are convicted that the petitions we bring to the Lord are very important! So this ought to attract our attention to this prayer.

But let me also say this: If after we consider this prayer, we find that it goes beyond just the local situation in Thessalonica, and that it has an application to the people of God in every generation (as it does), then we need to consider making this a part of our prayers as we pray for one another. This is one of the reasons that the prayers of the

Apostle Paul are recorded for us. The Holy Spirit was not only telling us how Paul prayed, but He was indicating how we need to pray if we are going to be dealing with issues of abiding importance to the people of God in every generation.

But let me ask, Why do we pray? We pray because we realize that we can't do for people what needs to be done for them, and we pray for people because we know that they can't do for themselves what needs to be done. We pray because God is the only One Who can do what they need. What Paul was asking God to do went far beyond the ability of any believer, or any church--beyond the ability of even Paul himself! And the word "always" seems to suggest that what Paul was asking God to do was not going to be done all at once, but that it was a continuing work in the life of every believer. And you will notice that he said, "~~We~~ pray always for you"--meaning that he and Silas and Timothy were all praying for this very same thing. Furthermore, it was not something that just applied to the believers in Thessalonica because Paul said in verse 10 that the Lord was coming "to be glorified in his saints," that is, in all of them. So this means, as I have pointed out, that this is a request we need always to be praying for ourselves and for each other.

So to get the full impact of this request let me reread the first part of our text: "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would..." Paul was calling upon God to do something for the Thessalonians that was extremely important, which was a continuing need, which Paul could not meet for them, and which they could not meet for themselves. And it was a need which each believer in Thessalonica had.

Be sure to get these details firmly fixed in your mind.

Now let us go on to:

## II. THE REQUEST (2 Thess. 1:11b).

Here it is: "That our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."

The first thing that we need to learn is, What did Paul have in mind when he spoke of "this calling"? He evidently had referred to it in what he had written before. What was it?

We find it in verse 10. (Read.)

This verse tells us what is going to happen when the Lord comes. He is coming "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

Notice the two times that the Apostle used the word in. The NIV and the NASB change the second "in" to among, but the same preposition in is used in both places in the Greek.

Paul spoke of this as our "calling." This has to do with God's purpose in our salvation. You can see it very clearly in 2 Thess. 2:14. (Read.)

We see it also in 2 Tim. 1:9:

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

God's purpose in our calling to salvation is that we would be glorified—changed into the very likeness of our Lord. Now what person, what child of God, in his right mind would ever think that he is capable of making himself like the Lord? None of us would. As I have said, that is beyond what we can do for ourselves, and it is beyond what we can do for each other. That is why Paul was pleading with God for the believers in Thessalonica. Only God can make us like Christ. We all agree with that.

But what did Paul mean in stating this request, "That our God would count you worthy of this calling"? Surely he did not mean that we are worthy of being made like our Lord! No, he didn't mean that. He meant that this is our calling; now may God so work in us that we would measure up to the purpose He had in saving us. To "count you worthy" means to make you worthy. God is the One Who enables us to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is a work which goes on day after day, trials and testings being a big part of His work in us. And Paul describes this a fulfilling "**all the good pleasure of his goodness.**" This is the Holy Spirit's definition of salvation. It is the good pleasure of God's goodness. It is what God delighted to do. It was the manifestation of His sovereign goodness toward those whom He redeems. The expression suggests that nothing less than what God has done for us in saving us could possibly satisfy Him.

And Paul was praying that God would "fulfil" it--that is, leaving nothing out that He has purposed to do.

This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote Phil. 1:6.  
(Quote.)

But doesn't this raise a question for us? If God is sovereign, and He had in mind our transformation into the likeness of Christ even before He saved us, then why do we need to pray about it? I doubt if any of us knows the full answer to

that question, but let me suggest some answers.

We pray about it in recognition that we know what God's purpose is in saving us. We pray about it also to indicate our submission to the Lord as He works in our lives to make us like our Savior. And we pray about it to indicate that this is what we want, and we want it as quickly as we can get it.

But we also pray about it because of the last part of verse 11: "And the work of faith with power."

We all know that faith is a gift from God. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. God gave us the faith by which we have been saved. But our perfection comes about as we continue to trust the Lord. We trust Him in our times of testing. We trust Him to make us what He wants us to be. We trust Him to do the right things with us to make us like Christ. All through our lives we learn more and more about trusting the Lord. We fail often to trust Him and we should, and this is another reason that we pray. We pray for faith. We ask the Lord to help us to trust Him even when we do not understand what He is doing. We trust Him even when He seems to be withholding His blessing from us. And so this work of salvation, while being a work of God, is not a work in which we have no part. We are looking to the Lord for the faith we need every day we live to trust Him, just to trust Him, because we know that He loves us too much to harm us, His is too wise ever to make a mistake, and He is too powerful ever to fail. In every one of our lives He is working continually to strengthen our faith "with power."

The only way you and I can ever hope to measure up to God's purpose in saving us, is for Him to make us worthy because of what He is doing in us and for us.

All of this leads to the final verse of the prayer. I don't know what else to call it but:

### III. THE RESULT (2 Thess. 1:12).

"That" means that it might come to pass, or that it might be possible. If God doesn't do it, it won't be done. The purpose of our salvation is so high that we could never reach it without Him.

Leon Morris made this helpful comment on "the name" in his commentary on the epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians:

The name in Biblical times was much more than a means of distinguishing one person from another. It summed up the whole character of a person" (p.

211).

And then in a footnote he quoted a G. B. Gray who said the a person's name was "almost an equivalent of the 'personality' or 'character' or nature of the person...named; and consequently , when a writer wishes to express forcibly the nature of a person..., he said he will be called so-and-so, or his name will be so-and-so" (Ibid.).

Relate all of this to our Lord Jesus Christ. This is His Name. "The name of our Lord Jesus Christ" speaks of all that He is, His holy character. There never has been and there never will be another like Him. But again notice the two times in this verse that we have the word "in." We certainly will glorify Him with our voices, with our praise. But that is not what Paul was praying about. He was praying "that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him."

In Jerry Bridges new book, The Discipline of Grace, he quoted Sinclair Ferguson, a Scottish theologian, who said that the truth of our union with Christ is "a doctrine which lies at the heart of the Christian life" (p. 65). And Jerry also quoted John Stott of England who said in one of his books that the three expressions, "in Christ," "in Him," and "in the Lord" are found "no less than 164 times in Paul's letters" (Ibid.).

The Lord Jesus was the first one to talk about this. In John 6:56 we are told that the Lord said,

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood,  
dwelleth in me, and I in him.

In John 15:4, 5 we have these words spoken by our Lord:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot  
bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the  
vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.  
I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abid-  
eth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth  
much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

The Apostle Paul said in Gal. 2:20 that Christ was living in him, and when he said that he was speaking for all of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. In Col. 1:27 Paul spoke of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

What amazing truth this is! And who would be bold enough to say that he can fully explain what it means? This is what we call our union with Christ. He lives in us; we live in Him. And the more we learn to trust the Lord, the more evident that relationship will be. And when the Lord comes in His glory, His glory will be seen in us, and we will be glorified

in Him. We can't imagine how truly glorious that will all be.

But look at how Paul concluded his prayer: "According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

When people who do not know the Lord hear us speaking of our relationship with Him, and what the Lord is doing in our lives, they could easily feel that we are boasting--if they realize at all the greatness and holy majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we are not boasting, or we should not be, because Paul reminded us here in his prayer that all that we are or ever will be we owe to "the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." It is all of grace, God's Christ, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We don't deserve a bit of it. We are not really worthy to speak His holy Name. And yet by God's grace and by God's power, God is doing a miraculous work in the hearts and lives of His people to make us more and more like His precious Son.

Concl: This is what salvation is. And this is what our prayer for ourselves and for each other should be-- "always." There is so much to be done in all of us before God has fulfilled "all of the good pleasure of his goodness" in us. And until the work finished, this needs to be our prayer.

Paul could rejoice because of the progress that the believers in Thessalonica had made in their walk with the Lord, but they had only started. There was still much which needed to be done in their lives, and so he kept praying. There is nothing more wonderful for us to see in each other than the evidence of what the Lord is doing in our lives to make us what He wants us to be. Even though the Apostle John said, "We shall be like Him," speaking of Christ, yet he also had to say, "And it doth not yet appear what we shall be." We are going to be like the Lord, but we can't fully understand what that is going to mean. But it will be wonderful! No more doubting. No more sinning. No more failing. And how wonderful it is to know that God will not be satisfied until He has fulfilled "all of the good pleasure of his goodness" in us.

If you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, will you come to Him, and trust in Him to save you from your sins and to turn your life around. Only Christ can make you a new creature. God's promise to all is that if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting Him and Him alone to save us, we shall be saved. May God grant that any who are here today without Christ may come to Him, believe in Him, and be saved.

A VERY SPECIAL THANKSGIVING  
2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14

Intro: One lesson we are learning about the prayers of the Apostle Paul is that he spent much of his time in prayer praising the Lord. That was true in 1 Thessalonians, and it is true in 2 Thessalonians. We have it in 1 Thessalonians 1:2 and 2:13 and 3:9. Although I didn't spend much time on it, we had it again in 2 Thessalonians 1:3, and now we come to it again in 2:13. And it is interesting that Paul, in speaking of the prayers that were offered for the Thessalonians, continued to say, "We." This would mean that Silas and Timothy were with the apostle in his burden for the church at Thessalonica.

Today I want to consider with you the prayer in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14. And, if time permits, I want to bring in the prayer which is found in the last two verses of this chapter (16 and 17) because it is closely related to Paul's thanksgiving in verses 13 and 14. Verses 16 and 17 are intercession.

However, before we look at the prayer, I want you to look at what leads up to the prayer in the first eleven verses of chapter 2.

In verse 2 we learn that many in the church had been alarmed, had been greatly disturbed, had been mentally shaken up, by some communication which supposedly had come from Paul and his co-workers saying that "the day of **the Lord**" (the better reading) had already come. And then he proceeded to tell them what had to happen first.

(Survey verses 3-12.)

Then Paul introduced his prayer of thanksgiving with the word, "But," showing how different was God's plan for those who had been saved in Thessalonica. (Read verses 11 and 12 with the beginning of verse 13.)

So we can see that Paul was implying at least that the condition of the people in Thessalonica could have been just the opposite from what it was if God had not determined to act differently in their case. And so he felt "bound," deeply obligated to God, for what God had done to spare them from the judgment which others were going to experience. And he felt this obligation not just once, but continuously! **"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord."**

What was he thankful for?



I. THE REASON FOR HIS THANKSGIVING (2 Thess. 2:13m).

Let me state it as briefly as possible, using the Apostle's own words. Note these words in verse 13: He was thankful. as he said, that "God hath...chosen you to salvation." He was not just thankful, but he was thankful to God! You will often hear people say that they are thankful for this or that, but they rarely indicate that they are thankful to someone. It is as though something has happened which pleased them, and their thanksgiving is more of an expression that they feel lucky. Paul was not like that, nor are the other writers of Scripture like that. They are thankful to God! And Paul was here ascribing all of the glory for the salvation of these Thessalonians to God! God had made the situation in the lives of those believers different, very different, and neither he, nor Silas, nor Timothy could thank God enough for what He had done, and so they were inclined to thank Him all of the time.

Illus: Apply this to Oscar Burns who, as a boy 16 or 17 year old, his teens, stayed up all night reading his Bible to find out how to get right with God, and found the answer and was saved. Do we glorify Oscar for that? He would be the first to object to it if we did. No, that was something that God was doing. But what God did in Oscar's heart that night was the result of what God did before He ever created this world in which we live.

Now notice the full statement which Paul made: "God hath **from the beginning** chosen you to salvation."

Paul was speaking of the doctrine of election which probably most of us had trouble with when we first heard about it. But it is important for us to accept the fact that it is the teaching of Scripture--and therefore we need to know about it, and believe it. It may not be the way we would have planned salvation, but it is God's way, and the result for the Apostle Paul was unceasing praise to God.

Charles Simeon, who was a minister in the Church of England back in the 1700's, made this statement when he was preaching on these two verses:

It is true, that nothing but deep humility of mind can ever lead a man so to acquiesce in it as to approve of it in his soul, and to adorn it in his life. But where that humility exists, as it did in the Apostle Paul, the doctrine will be most grateful to the soul, and will form a ground of most unfeigned praise to Almighty God (Expository Outlines On The Whole Bible, Vol. 18, p. 390).

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian church he let praise flow out of his heart into his words, and this is what he said:

Eph 1:3-6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:  
According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:  
Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,  
To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

So one of the first evidences we will have that we understand the doctrine of election will be praise to God. Just think of it: Paul was teaching us in these passages that God not only had us in mind before the world was created, but that He chose us for salvation. But this is no problem for a God Who is omniscient, Who knows the end from the beginning. Nor is this a problem for Him when we consider that He is omnipotent, all-powerful. And would any of us question that God has the right to do whatever He wants to do regarding salvation? Everyone who has ever believed in Christ, or who will ever believe in Christ in the future, was chosen by God Himself for salvation. When you think of this, don't you feel about the Lord like David did when he wrote Psalm 8?

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him (Psa. 8:4)?

God didn't owe us, or any other human being anything. But in His infinite grace, and because of His great love, He chose us to be His for all eternity. That is amazing truth, and it ought to make worshippers out of all of us.

Now this has to do with eternity past. Let us look next into verse 14 where Paul spoke of eternity to come. And here he was concerned about:

## II. THE GOAL OF OUR SALVATION (2 Thess. 2:14b).

You have it in those words, "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul did not say, "So that we would all be in heaven some day." That surely is a part of our salvation, but God is concerned not just about where we will be, but what we shall be.

In 1 Thess. 5:9 Paul said,

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

We have salvation now, but we are going to have it in its fullness when we obtain "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let me ask you a couple of questions: If you were planning salvation, would you have ever thought of such a goal for the people of God? And if you had thought of it, would you have dared to mention it?

This was Paul's way of saying that we are going to be like our Lord Jesus Christ. That is amazing truth! Why do we stagger at the doctrine of election and not stagger at the doctrine of our glorification? What right do we have to believe that we have been chosen by God for salvation? It's in the Word! What right do we have for believing that some day we are going to be like Christ? It's in the Word. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," said the Apostle John.

On the basis of what we have in this prayer, let me define salvation for you. Salvation is that work of God whereby He chooses defiled, guilty, helpless, and worthless sinners, and through Christ saves them and makes them like Christ. It began with our election in eternity past, and it will all be completed for eternity when our Lord comes again.

But, having seen that, how will the work be done? Or to state it another way,

### III. WHAT ARE THE MEANS TO THIS GLORIOUS END?

We have this in the last part of verse 13 and the first part of verse 14. But let me start with the first part of verse 14.

A. "Whereunto He called you by our gospel" (v. 14a).

Will you notice from this statement that the Thessalonians did not initiate their own salvation. They were not the ones who took the first step toward God; God took the first step toward them. And that is always the way it is.

Do you remember that hymn that we often sing which presents this truth so clearly?

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew  
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;  
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,  
No, I was found of Thee.

How does He call us? Paul said it was "by our Gospel." It is the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. That is why we preach the Gospel. Election does not eliminate the

necessity for preaching the Gospel; election includes the preaching of the Gospel.

When Oscar Burns stayed up all night reading the Bible, what was he looking for? He may not have known it then, but he was looking for the Gospel. And why was he looking? Because God was calling him. We all may have heard the Gospel under different circumstances, but it was always God calling us, and calling us by the Gospel. That is why I have said so often that no one is ever saved apart from the Word of God. We hear the Gospel, and it is through hearing the Word that God gives us faith to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

And let me add this. As we get acquainted with our Bibles we learn that if we want to see others saved, we need to give them the Gospel. We need to tell people what Jesus Christ did in order to save sinners from their sins. We give people the Gospel, and then trust the Lord to use His Word for the accomplishment of His purposes.

Is that all there is to salvation? No. Let us look now at the second part of verse 13. There you will find two more things that are an essential part of our obtaining the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Note that it has to do with:

B. The "sanctification of the Spirit" (v. 13b).

Here is another wonderful part of salvation which we did not ask for, but we should never cease praising God that God has given us the Holy Spirit to abide with us forever.

If you are really saved, the Holy Spirit has been living in you from the moment you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. You may not have known that until sometime after you were saved, but He came when God saved you, and He will never depart from you.

Why has this Person of the Godhead come to live in you and in me. Well, according to what the Lord said about Him in the words we find in John 14, 15, and 16, He has come to guide us into the truth. He is the Author of Scriptures, and He has come to teach us the meaning of Scripture. And it is His special delight to show us Christ in the Word of God.

However, it is in 2 Cor. 3:18 that the Apostle Paul brought all of this together. This is what he said:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

In the NKJ it reads like this:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18, NKJ).

Through the Word of God, as we read it, and believe it, and obey it, the Holy Spirit is transforming us little by little, making us more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. He is sanctifying us. He is making us holy. You and I would be very uncomfortable in heaven if we were not holy. God is holy; our Lord Jesus Christ is holy; the Holy Spirit is holy; and we are going to be holy. But that work is going on right now!

But there is one more point I have to make before I close. It has to do with:

C. "Belief of the truth" (v. 13b).

"Belief" speaks of faith, doesn't it? "The truth" speaks of the Scriptures. So "belief of the truth" is faith in the Word of God. The Christian life is a life in which we are learning more every day about what it means to trust the Lord. And this is a vital part of our sanctification. We believe the doctrines of Scripture. We believe the promises of Scripture. And by faith in the truth we live in obedience to the truth. There can be no real holiness apart from faith in the Word of God.

Concl: Now, as I promised, look at the last two verses of this chapter. In verses 13 and 14 Paul was expressing his praise to God for what He had done in the lives of the Thessalonian believers; in verses 16 and 17 he told them how he was interceding with God for them. In the light of what the Lord was doing in their lives, Paul presented a two requests:

- 1) That God would "comfort" their hearts. This included the ideas of encouraging and strengthening. And, oh, how we need this. It is so easy to get discouraged, but the God Who chose us, and called us, and saved us, is going to encourage us along the way until His work is finally completed in our lives.
- 2) That God would establish them "in every good word and work." See 1 Thess. 3:13. The word "stablish" contains the idea of getting us set in the right direction, and then keeping us on course. The course can't be anything else but what the Apostle Paul has been writing about--moving on in the direction of our conformity to the likeness of Christ.

May this be our prayer, too--for ourselves and each other.

A VERY SPECIAL THANKSGIVING -

## FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2, 5, 16, 18

Intro: It is apparent from this epistle to the church at Thessalonica that the Apostle prayed for the believers in the church, but it is also clear that the Apostle Paul wanted the people to pray for him. We see this in his words at the opening of chapter 3: "Finally, brethren, pray for us."

He had said the same thing in 1 Thessalonians, but without giving any special requests. He simply said, "Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thess. 5:25).

But there are several other passages in which prayer for the Apostle Paul and his co-workers was mentioned. E.g., Rom. 15:30-32:

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;  
That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;  
That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.

And then notice what Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 1:9-11:

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:  
Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;  
Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

He also sought prayer in Eph. 6:18-20:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;  
And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,  
For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

And then we have this appeal for prayer in Col 4:2-4:  
Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with

thanksgiving;

Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

And, if you are like I am and believe that Paul wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, we can include what we find in Heb. 13:18-19:

Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

So we can see from all of these passages that it was not unusual at all for the Apostle Paul to seek prayer support from the people of God wherever he had contact with them. The apostles prayed for the people of God, and they asked the people of God to pray for them. They really believed that they would see greater blessing with the prayers of the saints than without the prayers of the saints.

In applying this to the Lord's work today we can see that pastors, elders, and deacons should pray for their people, but we also see that the Lord's people need to be faithful in upholding their spiritual leaders. The one is just as important as the other. Missionaries need prayer support, but they also have a responsibility to pray for those who pray for them.

This is why I have entitled my message for today, **FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER**. Not everyone can give, and no one can give as much as he or she would like to give, but we can all pray! And we all need to pray. If we could only see how vital this is in the work of the Lord, we would all be spending more time in prayer than we are.

In this final chapter of 2 Thessalonians we have examples of both kind of prayer. In verses 1 and 2 we see how Paul wanted them to pray for him. In verses 5, 16, and 18 we have Paul's prayers for the believers at Thessalonica. I am going to attempt to deal with all of them in one message hoping that the Holy Spirit will impress upon all of our hearts how important it is for us to be praying.

If 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written from Corinth, as many believe they were, then these requests in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 3 were for the church at Corinth. We know, especially from 1 Corinthians, that the church of Corinth was plagued with all kinds of serious problems. Paul felt the need to be supported in that work, and it is interesting to think of his

requests in the light of the situation in Corinth. When he said, "Finally," he was not indicating that he was concluding his epistle. We could translate it very accurately, Furthermore. It indicated he was moving to a new point, and a very important point. It was an expression, a translation of two words in the Greek, which certainly would have attracted the attention of the readers--which is what he wanted to do because he followed it with his requests for which he wanted them to pray.

I. PAUL'S REQUESTS FOR THE THESSALONIANS' PRAYERS (2 Thess. 3:1, 2).

The requests fall into two groups:

- 1) Concerning the Word of God.
- 2) Concerning the opposition.

A. Concerning the Word of the Lord (v. 1).

Here also there are two parts:

1. That it would "have free course."

The word "free" is not in the original; it has been added by the KJ translators to make the meaning clearer. The word "course" is a word which was commonly used in racing events. And it is sometimes translated run. Paul's request concerned himself, Silas, and Timothy, as they were like runners racing against time to carry the Word of God to the Corinthians. But the important part was the ministry of the Word of the Lord, and so he portrayed the Word as running. The word "free" was added because Paul was praying that all obstructions would be removed so that nothing would hinder God's work through His Word.

The second part:

2. "And be glorified."

I hope that our recent studies of the glory of Christ will help us in getting Paul's meaning here. For the Word to "be glorified" means that people would accept it as the Word of God. God's Word is glorified when people accept the fact that it is the Word of the Lord, not just the word of man. Cf. 1 Thess. 2:13.

And to this Paul added the words, "even as it is with you." Paul was asking them to pray that God would work through His word as rapidly and as effectively as He had worked in Thessalonica.



God does not work in every city with the same speed. Sometimes the work of the Lord progresses very slowly. Sometimes the Lord's work moves easily (as it did in Thessalonica); at other times it is very hard, and very discouraging. Paul knew how God could work if He chose to, and that is what he was asking the believers at Thessalonica to pray for--a repetition of what He had done in Thessalonica. How wonderful it would be to see the Lord work like that again, and that ought to be our prayer for the work here at Trinity and throughout this whole Portland-Vancouver area.

But then Paul gave them his second prayer request:

B. "That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men" (v. 2).

If we can distinguish between "unreasonable" and "wicked" it could be that "unreasonable" describes the men, and "wicked" points to the effect of what they were doing. They were evil men who produced evil results. They were completely out of place, opposing what they should have received with great joy. And the reason they did what they did was because, lit., they did not have THE faith. They were not believers.

It ought to be of interest to us that Paul did not ask prayer for their salvation. He asked that they (he and his co-workers) would be rescued from these men, whoever they were.

It would be wonderful if all men did have the faith, if all were receptive to the truth, and that all would be saved. But that obviously is not the purpose of God. And one purpose they serve is to make the Lord's people realize that in order to see blessing in the work of the Lord, we must have the Lord's blessing, and the Lord has seen fit to make prayer the means we have of receiving His blessing.

So prayer needs to be made for those who will receive the Word, and prayer needs to be made against those who will reject the Word.

In verse 3 and 4 Paul encouraged them with the faithfulness of the Lord, as well as expressing his confidence in them **"in the Lord."** (Be sure to note that three words.)

Paul did not ask them to contribute to his work. And he only sought the blessing of the Lord so that he might continue on in the ministry with the blessing of God upon himself, Silas, and Timothy.

Those are requests we can use for the Lord's work everywhere.

Throughout the remainder of the chapter Paul sprinkled in three requests which he was praying for them. The first in verse 5 has to do with the love of God. The second in verse 16 has to do with the peace of the Lord. The third in verse 18 has to do with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us examine them in the time that remains.

## II. PAUL'S PRAYERS FOR THE BELIEVERS IN THESSALONICA (2 Thess. 3:5, 16, 18).

We might refer to these not only as apostolic prayers, but as pastoral prayers. Every believer, every church, needs someone to be praying these requests for them.

### A. Concerning "the love of God" (2 Thess. 3:5).

If we relate this to what Paul had just been saying (and we should) about their prayers for him, for Silas, and for Timothy, then how are we to take it? Why would Paul include such a request here?

I don't profess to have the complete answer to that question, but it seems that Paul was suggesting that the only way the Thessalonians would possibly be faithful in prayer was through a great understanding of the love of God, and a corresponding increase in their love for God. The more we know about God's love for us, the more we are going to love Him in return. And the strongest force to keep us faithful to the Lord is right here: knowing more of His love for us, and experiencing a greater love for Him.

Now Paul's prayer indicated that this is not something that the Thessalonians could do for themselves; the Lord had to do it. And the word "direct" suggests the removal of every obstacle that would keep us from understanding God's love, which, in turn, would mean the removal of every obstacle that would keep us from loving God more and more.

What are some of the obstacles that stand in the way? Our involvement in the world. This includes many things. Our refusal to take time for the Word, and for prayer. Our neglect of meeting with the Lord's people.

Now if we love the Lord, we are going to be waiting expectantly for Him. "Patiently" suggests perseverance. We do not wait idly for the Lord, but we keep pursuing the love of God, and living each day to glorify Him.

### B. Concerning "the peace of the Lord" (2 Thess. 3:16).

"The Lord" here, as in verse 5, is most likely a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. The peace that we need is not something that we produce within ourselves, but it is a gift which our Lord gives to us. Is this not what He promised us? Remember what He said to His disciples in the Upper Room:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you:  
not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not  
your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid  
(John 14:27).

Why did Paul speak of peace at this point in his epistle?  
Look at verses 6 through 15 and you will see. (Survey it.)

Leon Morris taught in his excellent commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians that peace is not just "the absence of strife," but it is "prosperity in the completest state" (p. 260). It is the blessing of God upon His people, and upon His work. If the peace of God is on a believer, he is prospering spiritually; if it is on a church, that church is seeing the blessing of the Lord. "Always" suggests that it not only can be continual, but that it ought to be. "By all means" can be translated, in every way. The Lord gives us peace in all of the changing circumstances of our lives. The peace of our Lord carries us through in every circumstance which we face.

Our Lord had another word to say about peace in the Upper Room. It was this:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me  
ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have  
tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have over-  
come the world (John 16:33).

Our peace is from the Lord and in the Lord. "The Lord be with you all" pictures a church and its people in peace.

The third request:

C. Concerning "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"  
(2 Thess. 3:18).

This is the way Paul concluded the first epistle. It is found twice at the end of Romans. You will see it also in 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philipppians, and Philemon. And this is the way the Apostle John concluded the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. In Col. 4:18 Paul shortened it by saying, "Grace be with you." In 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus it is also in its shorter form. We have what A. T. Robertson calls "the full Trinitarian benediction" in 2 Cor. 13:14:

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love  
of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be  
with you all. Amen.**

What does it mean?

It means that Paul was praying that they would be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ. In ourselves we are the personification of weakness. We so easily give in to temptation. We are easily influenced by the world. Our love for the Lord is continually fluctuating. What we need is strength, the inner strength which can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we recognize our weakness, and trust in the Lord to make us strong, then we are strong. His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

After the death of Moses, the Lord commissioned Joshua with these words:

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Joshua 1:5).

And then three times the Lord told Joshua to "be strong":

**Be strong and of a good courage:** for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them.

**Only be thou strong and very courageous,** that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Have not I commanded thee? **Be strong and of a good courage;** be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:6-9).

Joshua's strength came from two sources: the Lord's presence with him, and the Word of God in his hand and heart. Grace comes to us in the same way. The Lord is with us, and He ministers His grace to us through His Word.

Concl: There is much to learn in this passage—much to learn about praying for the work of the Lord, and much to learn about praying for the people of the Lord. Let's not permit these lessons to go unused, but let us make these our prayers for each other and ourselves, and confidently look to the Lord to give us His blessing that we may glorify Him.

A PRAYER FOR A TROUBLED CHURCH  
1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Intro: We learned in considering the prayers of Paul in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that Paul had written these epistles from Corinth--and that was early in the 50's A. D. When he wrote 1 Corinthians he had moved on to Ephesus. See 1 Cor. 16:8. He was writing about three, or possibly four, years later than he wrote the Thessalonian epistles. This would date them around 53 or 54 A. D.

It is clear from reading 1 Corinthians that the church at Corinth had many problems. It was a deeply troubled church. Paul had received information about the church from two sources:

- 1) "The house of Chloe" (1 Cor. 1:11). Who Chloe was, we do not know, and any attempt to identify her would be mere speculation. Paul had received information through some of her relatives about the divisions in the church at Corinth. The information covered in chapters 1 through 6 seems to have been from this source.
- 2) A letter which Paul had received from the church. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:1. And it seems that Paul was responding to that letter from chapter 7 on to the end of the epistle.

A reading of the epistle will show that in addition to the serious divisions they had, they had other problems which always accompany divisions, such as, pride, carnality, and criticism (some of which was directed against Paul). There was immorality in the church. Paul said it was worse than you would usually find among unregenerate Gentiles. There were problems regarding marriage. Some were taking advantage of the liberty which they had in Christ. They had problems regarding the observance of the Lord's Supper, and this was serious enough that God had judged some of the people in the church--some with sickness; others with death. Their fellowship had been broken over the misuse of spiritual gifts. And the church had been affected by false doctrine. This is not a complete list, but it is long enough to show that the Spirit of God was grieved with what was going on and that changes were needed if the church were to see the blessing of God again.

In the light of all of this, it is most amazing that we really have only one prayer of any length in the epistle, and just two short prayers to add to the long one.

The main prayer of the epistle is the one we find in chapter 1, the text I have chosen for this service today. The second is in 1 Cor. 15:57 where we read,

Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory

through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
And the third is the prayer which I have mentioned as being included in most of Paul's epistles. In 1 Corinthians we find it in chapter 16, verse 23: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

Today we are looking at 1 Cor. 1:3-9. Let me read this for you. (Read.)

How would you pray for a church in the condition which Paul knew was true of the Corinthian church at that time? They obviously needed prayer, much prayer. In fact, it seems very clear in reading the epistle that if God did not help them, the church could not possibly survive. However, when we are thinking about the work of the Lord, we must always have hope that things can be changed for the better. That was Paul's hope, and it is interesting to see the nature of this prayer because it shows us what our hope is when we face problems in our lives, in the lives of other believers, or in the life of a church in the twentieth century. Times have changed drastically from Paul's day to ours, but the problems we have are very similar to the problems that they had, and the solution to their problems is the solution to those same problems wherever they appear today.

One great lesson we learn from this first epistle to the Corinthians, is that the people needed teaching. They needed teaching on a variety of subjects, and Paul gave them teaching. We always get into trouble when we are either ignorant of the Word of God, or when we do not pay attention to what we have learned from the Word. A church without solid, Biblical teaching, really ceases to be a church in the New Testament meaning of the Word. If a church is well-taught, many problems can be avoided altogether. So nothing must ever be allowed to replace the teaching of Scripture.

But it is also very important for us to see that before Paul began to teach, before he uttered a word of rebuke, he told them how he was praying for them. And so we have that well-known emphasis of Scripture in this epistle, prayer and the Word, with prayer coming first.

We can see in the life of our Lord how important prayer was, and we can also see how important His teaching was. When the apostles in the early church in Jerusalem found themselves dealing with increased responsibilities which threatened to draw them away from their main ministry, deacons were appointed to help them. And this was the explanation that the apostles gave to the church:

It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

**But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word** (Acts 6:2b-4).

I remember reading this statement somewhere many years ago:

We can do more than pray after we have prayed,  
but we cannot do more than pray until we have prayed.

There is a great emphasis on prayer in the Word. We see this all through the Pauline epistles. And there needs to be real priority given to prayer in your life and mine.

Please note that in this prayer we have:

I. THE APOSTLE PAUL'S USUAL GREETING (1 Cor. 1:3).

I won't take a lot of time on this verse today because we had the same prayer in both 1 and 2 Thessalonians. But grace and peace were especially needed in the church at Corinth. The epistle shows that they knew very little about their daily need for the grace of God, and the troubles in the church meant that they were not experiencing much of the peace of God.

You can be sure that it was not as a formality that Paul began this epistle in this way. He may have used it countless numbers of times before, but if a church ever needed the grace of God and the peace of God, it was this church in ancient Corinth. In fact, if God did not bless them with His grace and His peace, there was very little point in Paul writing. God's grace would make them receptive to what Paul had to say; God's peace would make them willing to do what Paul would tell them to do--or not to do!

So don't miss verse 3 when you read through 1 Corinthians 1.

The second thing to notice (and this is very characteristic of the Apostle Paul, was:

II. THE APOSTLE'S THANKSGIVING REGARDING THE PAST (1 Cor. 1:4-7).

Don't worry that there is no period at the end of verse 7. The punctuation is not inspired. You will find that it varies from translation to translation. The important thing that we are after is to be able see when Paul (or any of the other writers) moves from one point to another. Verses 4 through 7 give us his thanksgiving for the way that God had blessed them up to that moment. And He had blessed them greatly. And while verses 8 and 9 could also be considered a

part of his thanksgiving (and it really is), yet those verses have to do with what they could expect from God in the future.

These four verses, 4 through 7, tell us what God had already done for the believers in Corinth. You see, when there is not much to be thankful for in what you see in a Christian's life now, Paul would teach us to look back and remember what God has done for that Christian, or that church, in the past.

And so we come first to:

A. Thanksgiving #1 (v. 4).

Acts 18 is the chapter which tells us about Paul's ministry in Corinth. He went there by himself, and was joined later by Silas and Timothy. The Jews in Corinth was so strong in their opposition to the Gospel, that it was there that Paul turned in a special way to the Gentiles. And yet God had not finished his work with the Jews. This is the record which Luke gave in Acts 18:

And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:7-11).

When Paul thanked God for the grace of God which had been given to them, he was thanking the Lord that God in His grace had saved so many of the Corinthians. Godet stated it this way:

This grace comprehends the whole state of salvation, with the new life which has been displayed in the Church (I, 51).

See also 1 Cor. 1:2. (Read.) Note: God called them, and then they called "upon the name of Jesus Christ, both their's and our's."



Paul knew that God had done a work there, and he had been with them long enough to see that a true work of God had been done. For this he was thankful, and continued to be thankful in spite of the problems that had arisen in the church.

— But let us go on:

#### B. Thanksgiving #2 (vv. 5, 6).

Here is a very interesting point in Paul's prayer. He does not suggest that the remedy for their troubles was to be found in seeking additional blessings from the Lord, but in realizing what they already have in Christ. They had been "enriched by him," i.e., by God. They were spiritually wealthy. We sometimes hear it said about some wealthy person that it is not possible to calculate how much money they have. Spiritually this is true of every Christian. Paul told the Ephesian church that they were blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). This is true of all believers. We don't need more; we need to know and appropriate the blessings that we have. We may differ in spiritual gifts, but not in spiritual blessings.

— Oh, how rich we are! God has not spared anything to make us spiritually wealthy beyond our greatest comprehension. And yet Paul was thankful that God's blessing on the believers in Corinth had included the ability to speak about their salvation, and in a special way God had made clear to them the knowledge of the truth.

Do you remember what the Lord said to the church at Smyrna in Rev. 2:9? He said,

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty,  
(but thou art rich)...

And then in the next chapter He said to the Laodicean church,  
Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased  
with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest  
not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and  
poor, and blind, and naked:  
I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the  
fire, that thou mayest be rich... (Rev.  
3:17-18a).

Both churches were equally rich in Christ. The church at Smyrna knew it, and they were appropriating their riches in spite of their troubles. The Laodicean church had the same riches, but material wealth meant more to them than what they had in Christ, so they were living like spiritual paupers.

— The church at Corinth was like that. In the past they had shown how rich they were by their testimony and by their knowledge of the Gospel. Their testimony of Christ, about

Christ--their love for Christ--had been "confirmed in" them.

I have called your attention before to that little preposition, in. Here it is again. God's work in them was so deep and real, and their love for the Savior was so evident, that they themselves were a confirmation of the truth of the Gospel. The power was not only in what they said and in how they said it, but in what they were!

Does this not indicate that the Corinthians had gotten their eyes off of the Lord, and probably on each other? When a person is first saved, he or she is usually very much in love with the Lord. He loves to hear about the Lord. He loves to talk about the Lord. But so often the first love is lost, and that opens the door for all kinds of trouble. It is only by loving the Lord, and by growing in our love for the Lord, that our lives, as well as our lips, will show how much He means to us. Salvation is nothing less than a living relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us look at:

### C. Thanksgiving #3 (v. 7).

To "come behind" means to be deficient, or to fall short. The meaning of this statement at the beginning of verse 7 is that no church could have been more gifted than the church at Corinth was. Speaking of spiritual gift (which Paul did later in this epistle), you could find them all in the Corinthian church. And to their credit, they not only believed in the coming of the Lord, but they were expecting Him momentarily!

And yet with all that God had done for them, they were still in trouble. And it was because their fellowship with the Lord was not what it had been at the first.

In the early days of Trinity when we had some weekday classes in Church History and New Testament Greek, Gary Custis pointed out in his church history class that the tendency of the Lord's people spiritually has been downward, and away from the Lord. You can see that in our day. Churches that used to be powerhouses for the Lord are not that way anymore. We have all seen people who seemed to be deeply in love with the Lord, but that love is not there anymore. I hope that is not true of any of us. It can happen in a pastor's life just like it can happen to anyone else.

As we look at the Lord's work today, what is our hope? What assurance do we have that the work of the Lord will not die, but that those who are truly saved will finally make it?

Look at what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in verses 8 and 9.

III. THE APOSTLE'S HOPE (1 Cor. 1:8, 9).

— The subject of verse 8 is "our Lord Jesus Christ," mentioned at the end of verse 7. He is going to "confirm" each one of us "to the end." What does this mean?

It means that He is going to make sure that we continue to believe, and that we show our faith by our obedience to His Word. This is final perseverance. The Lord will persevere with us so that we will persevere until we get to heaven. And His work in us and for us will be so effective that we will "be blameless," unchargeable, faultless, "in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is Phil. 1:6. (Quote.)

But look how Paul's prayer ends. Verse 8 tells us what the Lord Jesus Christ is doing for us. Verse 9 assures us of the faithfulness of God. If the Lord weren't working in us, and if God were not faithful to us, there would be no hope for any of us.

— God called us to Himself for salvation. But what does this really mean? It means that we have been called into a life of fellowship with the greatest, the most precious Person Who ever walked upon the earth: our Lord Jesus Christ. And so our greatest concern should be our love for Him. When our love for Him grows cold, then things go bad for us spiritually. But when our love for Him is strong and fervent, we can face the trials of life in peace because day by day we are drawing upon His wonderful grace.

Concl: How do you pray for a troubled church? Just like Paul prayed for the church at Corinth. He prayed that

they would remember what they have in Christ, what God has done for them in Christ, that they would get their eyes back on the Lord and love Him again like they once did, resting not in their faithfulness to Him, but in His faithfulness to them. If all of this were to take place, the testimony of the church in Corinth could be revived, and she could once again be a blessing in the city, a mighty instrument in the hand of God.

— Let us make the application to our own lives. Do we love the Lord like we once did? Do we know how very wealthy we are, spiritually wealthy, in Christ? God could not have done more for us than He has done. We need to remember that, and walk with Him each day believing that some day we will be blame-

less in His sight when His work in us will be completed.

If you do not know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, and might be holding back because you do not think that you could live up to the way Christians are supposed to live, I hope you have seen today that when the Lord lays His hand on us, He never takes it off, and He never gives up on any of us. So come to Him today, put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will cleanse you of your sins and bring you into this wonderful life of personal fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAISE TO THE GOD OF CONSOLATION  
2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Intro: The word "comfort" which we find first in this passage in verse 3, is found several times down through verse 7. But that fact is not as clear in our English translation as it might be. Sometimes the word has been translated "consolation." Follow me in your Bibles and I will point them out for you:

- 1) "Comfort" in verse 3.
- 2) "Comforteth," "comfort" (2x -- one a verb; the other, a noun), and "comforted" in verse 4.
- 3) "Consolation" in verse 5.
- 4) "Consolation" (2x) and "comforted" in verse 6.
- 5) "Consolation" in verse 7.

So it was clearly Paul's object to open this epistle by speaking of the comforting work of God. He it is Who comforts us, who consoles us.

However, the word in the Greek carries with it the ideas of encouraging and strengthening. God encourages us in our trials, and He strengthens us to go in spite of our trials. This is what He does as "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." To transliterate this word comfort into English, God is our Paraclete! The Lord Jesus implied that He, too, was a Comforter, or Paraclete, when He spoke these words found in John 14:16 and the first part of John 14:17:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

Even the Spirit of truth...

"Another Comforter" means another Comforter of the same kind as I am.

Therefore, we can say that God is our Comforter, the Lord Jesus is our Comforter, and the Holy Spirit is our Comforter. This is a title which belongs to all three Members of the Godhead. In 1 John 2:1 where we read that "we have an Advocate with the Father," John used this word Comforter.

The word can also mean an exhorter, but the main idea in our text for today is that of a Comforter, an Encourager, One Who strengthens His people.

This appears in our text as a form of prayer which we can rightly call, a doxology. One writer has called this prayer "a thankful and adoring statement of the Divine goodness and power" (Bernard, J. H., Expos. Gk. Testament, III, 38). It is a form of worship to be able to say what Paul said, if you can say it from your heart, as he did. And it can be a

source of great blessing to us if we understand what it means, and then see the evidence of it as we look at our lives from day to day. What Paul wrote here did not just apply to him, but it applied to the believers in Corinth. But even that did not mark its limitation. It has applied to every believer from the beginning of time down to the end of time. So it has a very personal application to you and to me. God is to each of us "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, Who comforteth us..."

I want to consider especially verses 3 and 4 with you today pointing out from this verse three reasons for our trials.

Trials come in many shapes and sizes. Trials can be major, or they can appear as the ordinary aggravations and frustrations which we meet with every day.

Paul had many different kinds of trials. It seems that uppermost in his mind as he wrote this chapter was the constant opposition he faced wherever he went preaching the Gospel. We also learn from this epistle that Paul had physical troubles. He mentioned his "thorn in the flesh" in chapter 12. But he also had real trials from working with the people of God. In 2 Cor. 11 Paul gave an extensive list of the trials he had experiences, and he added this at the end of the list:

Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, **the care of all the churches** (2 Cor. 11:28).

The NIV translates that verse this way:

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Speaking of Paul's ministry to the people of God, Charles Simeon made this interesting comment about the trials which Paul experienced in his care of the churches:

Who that has long ministered in holy things has not had occasion to deplore the fall of some, the apostasy of others, and the little progress of almost all; insomuch that with many he is made to "travail, as it were, in birth a second time, till Christ be formed in them?" Some perhaps, who would once have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him, are now become his enemies, because he has told them the truth," and reproved them for their reigning and besetting sins. And in himself also every minister will find abundant occasion to sigh and mourn, especially when he reflects on his great insufficiency for the work assigned him, and the effects of his unprofitableness upon the souls of others (Vol. 16, p. 396).

Paul had his trials, you have your trials, and I have mine. No life is without its trials, its tribulations, its testings. We can thank God that life is more than trials. We have abundant blessings without which we could not live, and yet we can agree with Eliphaz who said to Job,

Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust,  
neither doth trouble spring out of the ground;  
Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly  
upward (Job 5:6-7).

We can be thankful that our trials are not like Job had, but nevertheless we have our trials. WHY? God could have ordered our lives otherwise. Why do we experience one trial after another, and often trials that remain with us instead of coming and going?

Let me give you three reasons from our text.

# I. TRIALS CAUSE US TO SEEK GOD.

Let me read the latter part of our Scripture reading and you can see what Paul had to say about himself. (Read vv. 8-11.)

If we didn't have our trials, it is doubtful if any of us would spend much time seeking God. As it is, when we get into our troubles, it seems that turning to God is about the last thing that we do. But Paul said here what we read in verse 9. (Re-read.)

When we turn to God, what do we find Him to be?

Well, first, we are made to realize that we are turning from the vain help of man to the power and wisdom and sufficiency of One Who is infinitely more than man. He is God! Let that thought grip our thoughts. The Psalmist said, "Know ye that the LORD He is God..." (Psa. 100:3).

But notice the way Paul described God here in our text: He is "the Father of **our** Lord Jesus Christ." He could have simply said, the Lord Jesus Christ, but instead he said, "**our** Lord Jesus Christ." You see, it is because the Lord Jesus Christ is "**our** Lord Jesus Christ," we have not only access to God (because we can only come to God through Christ), but we have a special claim upon God. There is no one more precious to God than His Son is. God finds all of His delight in His Son. And if His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is "**our** Lord Jesus Christ," then we can be reassured that God's love is upon us because of our relationship with His Son.

But in addition to that Paul gave us other words of encouragement. He said that God is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."

"The Father of mercies" -- This means that whatever mercies we receive, and however they may come to us, they all of their origin in God. They all come from Him. We can't find them in anyone else. Whatever we need, however great that need might be, we can also find an adequate supply in God. "Mercies" are acts of compassion. We don't have to spend time trying to convince God that we need His help; He is already on our side, working in our trials until we feel our need of Him.

"The God of all comfort" -- By this the Apostle Paul meant that there is comfort, encouragement, strength, help to be found in God, regardless of what the need may be, or how big or how little, or how brief or enduring. The consolation and blessing that we need from God can never be exhausted. If the whole world were to call upon God at once, it would be no problem for Him. After all, doesn't He take care of all of us every day giving us life, supplying our needs, protecting us and guiding us even when we don't ask him for His help.

You see, our trials reveal how weak we are in ourselves, how helpless and needy. And these are designed to make us look to the only One Who can help us, "the Father of ~~our~~ Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" -- all consolation and help.

But there is a second reason:

## II. OUR TRIALS OPEN THE WAY FOR US TO PARTAKE OF GOD'S CONSOLATION.

It is one thing to know that God is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and that He is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort," but that is not enough! We need to go on to be "partakers...of the consolation" (v. 7).

Notice the first part of verse 4: "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation," in all of our trials. This meant that as Paul wrote he was aware that God's comforting work was going on in his heart. More than that, he meant that God's comforting work is always going on in our hearts. Life would be intolerable for us if that were not true. How often have we found that when we got to some situation that we were dreading, it wasn't as bad as we thought it was going to be? That is God at work! That is God meeting our needs perhaps even before we have sought Him and His help.

Job said, "Thou he slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). Only God could enable Job to make a statement like that. Do you remember what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego told the king where there were told that they would have to



fall down and worship his image? Listen to their words:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:16-18).

Don't give them the credit for those words. That was evidence that God was comforting them, strengthening them, encouraging them. And what happened? They were thrown in the fiery furnace. The men who threw them in were consumed by the flames, but not a hair was singed from the body of either of them, and when they came out of the furnace, their bodies were not burned, their clothes were not destroyed, nor did they even have the smell of fire on them. That was God, too.

Let me give you an illustration from the life of the Apostle Paul. It was when he was meeting with the Ephesian elders as he made his way back to Jerusalem. Nobody wanted him to go because they knew that it would only mean trouble for him.

But this was his response:

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

Only "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" could enable Paul to make a statement like that.

We may not see spectacular deliverances like those often seen in the past, or we may. But we can depend upon God to be our Comforter, and to enable us to be partakers of His consolation. This means growth. This means progress in holiness. When we turn from our own insufficient resources to cast ourselves upon the faithfulness of God, then we find out what it means that He is "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."

But I come to my last point:

### III. OUR TRIALS ENABLE US TO BE INSTRUMENTS OF COMFORT TO OTHER BELIEVERS IN THEIR NEEDS.

Note how I have stated this point. When we learn how to find comfort in God, we do not become the source of comfort to others, but instruments through whom God's comfort can flow out to others.

I couldn't begin to remember all of the times I have received mercy and comfort from others through whom God has ministered to me. Sometimes the people have not known how the Lord has used them in my life because it has often been in a classroom, or in a church service. Sometimes it has been in the reading of a book. Sometimes it has been through Lucille, or some member of our family. Sometimes it has come through one of you.

Sometimes God uses us with people who do not know the Lord, and sometimes that ministry of mercy and comfort has been used by God to bring people to Christ, and then to God. There is no question but that the way God comforts us enables us to comfort others, but it is always God Who is at work, and to God alone belongs all of the glory.

Concl: But let me close by calling your attention again to the character of this prayer. It is a doxology. It is PRAISE TO THE GOD OF CONSOLATION -- a threefold praise:

- 1) We worship Him because He is the God that He is, "the Father of ~~our~~ Lord Jesus Christ," and "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." How amazing this is!
- 2) We worship Him for His mercy and His comfort which He has given us in the past, and which He is giving to us at this very moment.
- 3) We worship Him because sometimes He has used us to be His instruments of encouragement and strength to others. And we worship Him for using people in our lives to be an encouragement to us.

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
Call for songs of loudest praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet,  
sung by Flaming tongues above;  
Praise the mount--I'm fixed upon it--  
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee;  
(I am changing the words on the next two lines.)  
Prone to worship, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to serve the God I love;  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;  
Seal it for thy courts above.