

Session 6 Paul's Prayer in 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5

I. INTRODUCTION TO PAUL'S PRAYERS IN 2 THESSALONIANS

- A. Paul prayed that the Lord would comfort and establish the saints, that the influence of His Word would spread rapidly, that they be delivered from wicked men and guarded from Satan's traps, and that they be led by the Holy Spirit into God's love and the perseverance of Jesus (2 Thes. 2:16-3:5).

16May our Lord...who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work. 3:1...pray for us that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified...2that we may be delivered from...wicked men ...3The Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one...5Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. (2 Thes. 2:16-3:5)

- B. **Review:** It is important to understand the context of Paul's prayers in 2 Thessalonians. He prayed for the saints to be strengthened in the midst of persecution to respond to Jesus in a way worthy of Him—in wholeheartedness—so as to walk in the fullness of their destiny (2 Thes. 1:11-12). Paul planted the church in Thessalonica in the midst of persecution in just three weeks (Acts 17:1-9).

4...[I boast of]...your patience [perseverance] and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 5which is manifest evidence...that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom... 11Therefore, we pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness [their full destiny in the kingdom]... (2 Thes. 1:4-11)

- C. **Therefore:** We gain understanding of this prayer by seeing what Paul said before it—he affirmed their perseverance. Paul sent Timothy to encourage them not to be shaken in persecution (1 Thes. 3:2-4). He strengthened believers in various cities by reminding them of persecutions (Acts 14:22). Jesus told them “beforehand” to give them time to prepare their hearts to adjust their expectations to include great difficulties, yet with an increase of God's presence (Jn. 13:9; 14:29; 16:1-4, 33).

2...Timothy...to encourage you...3that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. 4For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened... (1 Thes. 3:2-4)

22...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)

II. PRAYER THAT THE LORD COMFORT AND ESTABLISH HIS PEOPLE (2 THESS. 2:16-17)

- A. Paul prayed that the Lord would comfort and establish these persecuted saints (2 Thes. 2:16-17). This prayer followed Paul's exhortation to stand fast (2:15) just after he had taught them about Jesus' coming and that the Antichrist would do great miracles to deceive many (2:3-12).

15Therefore... stand fast...16Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace,

17comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work. (2 Thes. 2:15-17)

- B. **Who has loved us:** God's love is the basis of our confidence that the Lord will answer this prayer. Divine love is the fountain or origin of all blessings that are given us as a free gift by grace.
- C. **Everlasting consolation:** Paul emphasized the reality of eternal glory to strengthen the Church in the face of persecution. The assurance of eternal comfort provides temporal encouragement. We will receive a 100-fold recovery of all that we lost in being persecuted. This sure hope purifies us.
- ¹¹**"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven..."**
(Mt. 5:11-12)
- ²**"...we shall be like Him..."**³**Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself. (1 Jn. 3:2-3)**
- D. **Comfort your hearts:** In view of their persecutions, they needed to be comforted by the Holy Spirit to enable them to stand firm. The Father is designated, "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3).
- E. **Establish you in every good word and work:** He prayed for them to be energized by God's grace so that they would be established or steadfast in the face of persecution, temptation, and labors in the kingdom. *Good word* means sound doctrine, and *every good work* refers to their godly lifestyle and kingdom labors. There is a natural tendency in our heart to drift from steadfastness.
- ¹⁷**...beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away... (2 Pet. 3:17)**
- ¹⁷⁴**I long for Your salvation...Your law is my delight.** ¹⁷⁵**...let Your judgments help me.** ¹⁷⁶**I have gone astray...seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments. (Ps. 119:174-176)**
- F. Paul's prayer in 2:17 is for the Spirit's help to obey, even as he prayed in 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13.
- ¹⁰**...praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith...**
¹²**May the Lord make you...abound in love to one another...¹³so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God...at the coming of our Lord... (1 Thes. 3:10-13)**
1. **Perfect what is lacking in your faith:** This is a prayer that the Spirit would bring them to fullness in every area related to their spiritual life and ministry. He desires to perfect what is *lacking*, i.e. our deficiencies in understanding, dedication, unity, motivations, resources, etc.
 2. **Abound in love:** In praying that we abound in love, he asks that the Spirit inspire us in three ways: to abound in greater understanding of God's love for us; to tenderize our hearts so that we abound in love for Jesus; and to cause love to overflow in us for others. Jesus asked the Father to impart the very love that He has for Jesus into our hearts (Jn. 17:26).

²⁶**...that the love with which You [the Father] loved Me [Jesus] may be in them. (Jn. 17:26)**

 3. **Establish your hearts blameless in holiness:** Paul's concern was that the saints live in such a way that, when Jesus returns, they will be found walking blameless in all the light that the Spirit gives them; that is, to live without any conscious compromise. He prayed that the saints be transformed so as to respond in a way that is worthy of Jesus and bring glory to Him on that Day that He returns so we are not be ashamed of our lifestyle at His coming.

¹⁰... He comes...to be glorified in His saints...¹¹We pray...God would count you worthy... (2 Thes. 1:10-11)

²⁸...abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (1 Jn. 2:28)

III. PRAYER THAT THE WORD OF GOD BE RELEASED IN POWER (2 THES. 3:1)

- A. Paul asked them to pray that the influence of God's Word would spread rapidly through his ministry (2 Thes. 3:1). Paul both prayed and asked a request for prayer for himself and his coworkers (3:1-2).

¹...pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you... (2 Thes. 3:1)

- B. **That the Word may run swiftly:** Paul wanted prayer that the "influence" of the Word would increase rapidly among both believers and unbelievers.

1. Jesus promised that the Spirit would supernaturally convict the people of sin. Such anointed preaching that pierces the heart in a deep way is sometimes more powerful than healings.

⁸He [the Spirit] will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and judgment. (Jn. 16:8)

2. Throughout history, when the spirit of conviction has been fully manifested, the Word took hold of the hearts of people until they were powerfully converted as seen in Acts 2 and 19.

³⁷When they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter... "What shall we do?"

³⁸Peter said, "Repent..." ⁴¹that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ⁴²They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...⁴³Fear came on every soul... (Acts 2:37-43)

¹⁰All who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus [from the revival in Ephesus]...

²⁰So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed [throughout Asia]. (Acts 19:10, 20)

- C. **That the Word may be glorified:** The Word is glorified when the Spirit releases miracles and conviction when the Word is proclaimed via preaching, singing, conversations, writing, media, etc.

- D. **Just as it is with you:** The Lord released His power through Paul's ministry in Thessalonica.

⁵Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit... (1 Thes. 1:5)

⁴And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks... (Acts 17:4)

- E. I encourage all to become students of revival to see how God works and how much He is willing to do through prayer. My favorite revivalists in recent history are David Brainerd (1718-1747), Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), George Whitefield (1714-1770), and John Wesley (1703-1791). They lived during the *First Great Awakening* in America (about 1730-c.1755). Charles Finney (1792-1875) was the most prominent preacher in the *Second Great Awakening* (about 1800-c.1850). The largest camp meetings were at Cane Ridge, Kentucky (early 1800s) with 25,000 attending. I also encourage all to read about John G. Lake (1870-1935) and his amazing healing ministry.

- F. Jonathan Edwards preached the famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. He read it by candlelight in the evening meetings, yet people wailed under the conviction of sin. George Whitefield and John Wesley also witnessed the power of conviction in England. Whitefield spoke to crowds of over ten thousand people who often cried out as the power of God descended on them.
- G. Charles Finney was a lawyer who was baptized with fire in his preaching. In 1857, he preached in New York City and claimed to see 500,000 new converts in eight weeks, about 60,000 a week.

IV. PRAYER THAT THE LORD DELIVER HIS PEOPLE FROM EVIL MEN (2 THESS. 3:2-4)

- A. Paul prayed that they be delivered from wicked men and guarded from Satan (2 Thes. 3:2-4). Paul did not pray for the total removal of wicked men who persecute the church, knowing that this will only happen when Jesus returns (2 Thes. 1:6-9).
²...[pray] that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith. ³But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. (2 Thes. 3:2-3)
- B. Some of God's people will be martyred in the end time (Dan. 11:34a), but the Lord promised to help some believes who are being persecuted (Dan. 11:34) without promising to deliver all of them.
³²The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits [miracles]... ³⁴When they fall [martyrs], they shall be aided with a little help [to escape martyrdom]...³⁵Some of those of understanding shall fall [martyrs], to refine them, purify them..." (Dan. 11:32-35)

V. PRAYER THAT GOD DIRECT THEM INTO LOVE AND PERSERVERANCE (2 THESS. 3:5)

- A. Paul prayed that the Spirit lead them into God's love and the perseverance of Jesus (2 Thes. 3:5). These are two of the highest points of the Spirit's transforming work, so we walk worthy of God.
⁵Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. (2 Thes. 3:5)
- B. **Direct your hearts into the love of God:** This prayer parallels Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:12. It takes God to love God. The power of the end times is found in walking in the love of God. This includes the supernatural ability to feel God's love and then to feel love back to God.
- C. **Direct your hearts into the patience of Christ:** This parallels Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. There is a fourfold perseverance seen in the Scripture that requires the Spirit's strength to walk in:
 1. **Perseverance to resist temptation:** This requires denying our flesh in obeying the Lord.
¹²Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (Jas. 1:12)
 2. **Perseverance in trials:** This speaks of loving God in difficult circumstances (Jas. 1:2-4).
²...count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience...⁴that you may be perfect and complete... (Jas. 1:2-4)
 3. **Perseverance in persecution:** He rewards those who are faithful in persecution (Mt. 5:10-12).

¹¹"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you...for My sake. ¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven..." (Mt. 5:11-12)

4. ***Perseverance over many years:*** Being sluggish includes drawing back from contending for the fullness of God's promises and for a breakthrough of the Spirit in our life (Heb. 6:11-12).

¹¹...that each one of you show the same diligence...until the end, ¹²that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb. 6:11-12)