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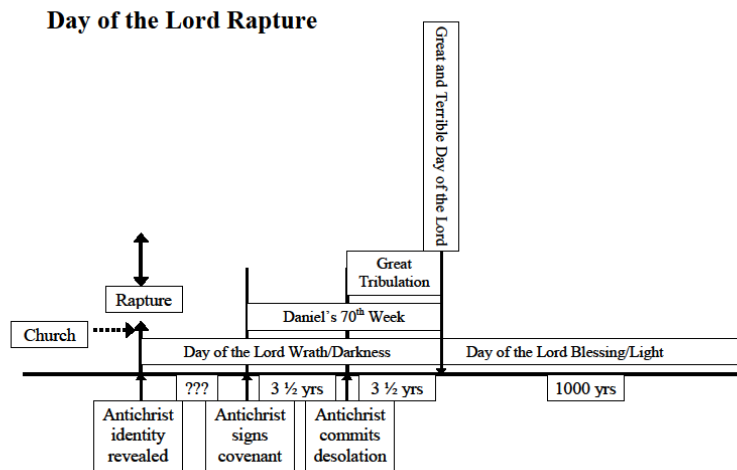
**A1130 – July 24, 2011 – 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17**  
**Prayer For Inner Comfort & Strengthening**

Today we come to 2 Thess 2:16-17, Paul's prayer for inner comfort and strength. At first glance it seems that not much is in here but upon closer analysis it is indeed shocking how much is embedded in these verses. And it's our goal today to extract out what turns out to be central components of Paul's theology, in particular Paul's Christology.

To review so we see Paul's prayer in its greater context let's back up to verse 2. The context in verse 2 is that doctrinal error had crept into the congregation at Thessalonica. The error had come in through three avenues; false prophets, false teachers and false letters. The error was that the day of the Lord had come and they were in it. This had shaken them up; it had agitated their minds as they couldn't stop thinking what if we are really in the day of the Lord. That's a serious agitation because they knew that the day of the Lord was a period of unparalleled wrath. So the mere thought that we as Christians were under wrath would be terribly disturbing. And since mental disturbances are destructive of Christian growth Paul is very concerned that their minds settle down from this baseless claim so they can regain their footing, get mental stability and start growing in the Christian life. Today Paul's chain of arguments to bring about this result will come to a close with his prayer for inner comfort and strength.

The first argument in Paul's chain begins in verse 3 by correcting this false doctrine that they were in the day of the Lord by reminding them of the truth that the apostasy must come first. In Pauline thought the apostasy is the spatial departure of believers from earth. What we call the Rapture Paul called the Departure. As far as timing occurs in God's eschatological program the Rapture occurs first, it is the next event, then the day of the Lord can come, but not until. Since the Rapture had not occurred the Thessalonians

could not possibly be in the day of the Lord. That is the first and most basic argument Paul uses to restore inner comfort and strength: you are not in the day of the Lord.



The second argument in Paul's chain is to remind them in vv 3b-12 of past teaching. Verse 5 very clearly shows that they had already been taught these things. And they are proof that they were not in the day of the Lord. Proof because none of the things in these verses had occurred. The essence of the proof is to sketch the antichrist's career, from how it begins when the restraint is lifted that is hiding his identity, all the way until it ends when he is taken away by the breath of Christ's mouth. Since none of these things had occurred therefore they could not possibly be in the day of the Lord.

As far as the Antichrist's career is concerned the beginning is described in verse 3b and again in verse 8, it begins when his identity is revealed. That is when the day of the Lord technically begins. It's at that time that it is possible for a human being to decipher the identity of the Antichrist by calculating the number of his name, which is 666. It's a mathematical/linguistic riddle and the person who has mathematical/linguistic skill will be able to decipher the number of his name and identify him at this time before he rises to world power, before he is well-known by the world such as when he comes into a treaty with the leadership of Israel. So this revealing of his identity, this unveiling is before that treaty is made.

Now, as for this unveiling there is something holding it back. Satan always has an antichrist, every generation has antichrist's, but only one of these antichrist's will become *the Antichrist*. And no one can figure out who he is until this restraint is removed. In verse 6 we are told what and who is restraining his identity. The restrainer is described as a "what," neuter, and a "him," masculine. And we showed that this is a very common way the NT authors refer to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes He is referred to in the neuter and sometimes He is referred to in the masculine. And the reason is simply because the Holy Spirit is in the background, the ministries of the Holy Spirit do not focus on the Holy Spirit, they focus on Christ, the Holy Spirit is always pointing to Christ. So we identified the restrainer as the Holy Spirit. In verse 7, when He is taken out of the way His restraint is removed and "then" verse 8, *the Antichrist* "will be revealed whom the Lord will take away," not slay, "take away with the breath of His mouth." So verse 8 contains the beginning of the career of the Antichrist, when his identity is revealed by the Holy Spirit and the end of the career of the Antichrist, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns at the Second Coming and casts him alive into the lake of fire. And in vv 9-12 you see the end of those who ultimately follow him and worship him as God.

So, as far as the timing of eschatological events is concerned the Rapture comes first, verse 3, then the day of the Lord begins when the Restrainer is taken out of the way, verse 7 and Antichrist's identity is revealed, verse 8, and highlights of his career are described until he is finally taken out of the way by the Lord Jesus Christ. Since none of those things had happened this is proof that the Thessalonians were not in the day of the Lord, which is a great comfort. It will settle their minds to know that they are not in the day of the Lord. And it would return their eyes to the key event they should be looking for, Christ's return for them at the Rapture. Always we are to be patiently expecting Christ to arrive at-any-moment. We are not looking for Antichrist; we are looking for Christ. He comes first. The day of the Lord comes after beginning with Antichrist and this period is wrath for the world and they will go to sudden destruction.

So therefore, verse 13, "...we should always give thanks to God." Why? Because it is God who has saves us from the sudden destruction of the day of the Lord. Why? Why are we saved from this sudden destruction? Because verse 13, "God has chosen us from the beginning for salvation," there was a

before time choice of God of you for salvation. How? “through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth,” that’s the in time work of the Spirit that lead us to faith in the gospel. To what end? Verse 14, “It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is, your destiny is to be resurrected as the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not destined for wrath in the day of the Lord but we are destined for resurrection at the Rapture. So Paul gives thanks to God for the salvation which secures us from ever entering the day of the Lord and guarantees our removal and resurrection with Christ at the Rapture.

So then, verse 15, logical inference, exhortation. Paul exhorts them to stand firm and hold to the traditions which he, Silas and Timothy had taught them. This will also settle them down, they were disturbed doctrinally, and he’s saying, stand firm and hold on to the traditions we taught you. And “the traditions” he taught them were the very word of God, not some separate line of oral traditions that were captured in the creeds and counsels of the Roman Catholic Church. What Paul is talking about by tradition is the word of God. The implication we said was that Paul knew he was speaking the word of God. And we found in 2 Cor and other passages that Paul indeed was aware that the Spirit of Christ was speaking in him. Peter and others were also aware that Paul’s writings were Scripture on the same level as the OT Scripture. So all he’s saying here by stand firm and hold on to the traditions is stand firm and hold on to the word of God. Why? Because that is what is going to calm you down mentally, they were shaken up terribly by these false teachings and so he’s trying to get them to relax by coming back to the truth that they were taught and stand firm on it, holding firmly to it, an excellent procedure.

And that brings us to verse 16, Paul’s final chain in the argument, prayer. Paul is aware that finally if they are to relax and calm down so they can start advancing spiritually again that God is going to have to pitch in. They can’t do it alone, that’s works, and so that’s why He prays. They’ve got to have God’s word, yes, that’s the standard, but they also have to have God’s grace, that’s His enablement to meet the standard, which here is very clearly, v 17, inner comfort and mental strength. Those things have to be in place before you can do every good work and good word. No Christian can grow spiritually while they are mentally disturbed.

So do you see the progression through the passage? In vv 1-12 the Thessalonians are mentally disturbed. They've been shaken up by the false doctrine that they were in the day of the Lord. So Paul corrects with true doctrine, you are not in the day of the Lord because the Rapture has to happen first. Then he proves they didn't miss it because Antichrist's career had not begun, no part of Antichrist's career had unfolded. So in vv 13-14 he thanks God that their salvation is secure because God had a before time plan that marked them out for a certain destiny when they are resurrected at the Rapture *before* the day of the Lord. Then in v 15 he exhorts them to stand firm on the truth they were taught, stand firm on the word of God. And finally in vv 16-17 he prays that the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father will give them the inner comfort and strength they need to do good deeds and words. Always you need the grace of God to enable you; you can't do it in your flesh.

So let's move to the prayer. And first a word about prayer. Paul was a prayer warrior, even early on in his career; 1 and 2 Thessalonians were all early in Paul's career, AD51. We see at least two lines of evidence in AD51 that prove Paul's emphasis on prayer. One, Paul's example of a life of prayer is evidenced in 1 Thess 1:2-5, 3:9-13; 5:23-24, here in 2 Thess 2:16-17 and in 3:16. And two, Paul's exhortations to a life of prayer in 1 Thess 5:17; 5:25 and in 2 Thess 3:1-2. So we have Paul leading the way by example and exhorting others to follow his example. It always has to start with leadership. Someone has to lead the way and then couple that with exhortation to follow, c'mon, follow my lead, we're going this way. And so Paul led the way by a life of prayer. He had a very intense prayer life and he exhorted other believers to have an intense prayer life.

Now why did Paul take prayer so seriously? Paul took prayer so seriously because he took Christian inability so seriously. Paul believed and taught that Christians, left to themselves, are fundamentally incapable. Left to ourselves our only asset is the flesh. And the flesh can do no good, it can only produce sin. And yet the amazing thing today is that the sway of the world today has led most Christians to think they are fully capable of doing good. And the way we can tell this thinking dominates Christian circles is by looking at the church's prayer life. If the church, and I'm speaking generally here of the church at large, if the church had a vibrant prayer life then it would be a primary activity in the church. And the fact that basketball and

rock music and every other entertainment device under the sun are primary shows you that prayer is not primary. And because prayer is not primary means that people believe in Christian ability, it means they think they are capable in and of themselves to do good. Now, I'm not judging your personal prayer life, you may be a prayer warrior, or in your own estimation a prayer warrior, I hope you really are one. But if you think I'm wrong in stating that the church today has a very pitiful prayer life then I'd like to see some evidence otherwise. And I'd like that evidence presented against the prayer standards put forth in Scripture. And the prayer standards put forth in Scripture are very high. When the Lord Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane and he went off to pray he came back an hour later and do you remember what he said to his disciples? Hey boys, what's wrong with you, wake up, you can't even pray for one hour? A scathing rebuke. And it's for this reason the disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." Because they saw the Lord Jesus pray, and remember, the Lord Jesus is operating out of His human nature, His prayers are coming out of His human nature, not His divine nature, so He didn't have any more assets to live the Christian life as you do. He had to pray in His human nature because even, and this is the remarkable thing, even a human nature that is sinless needs God's help to remain sinless. And if a sinless human nature needs to pray then how much more do people who have a sinful human nature need to pray. It's a remarkable thing to study the prayer life of the Lord Jesus. And they saw this perfect man here praying hour after hour and they're asking, how do you do it? I can't pray 5 minutes. Lord, teach us to pray.

Prayer is something you learn, this is not something that all of a sudden one day you wake up praying hour after hour on end. Prayer is a discipline and our point here is that Paul had mastered this discipline. He led the way by example for others and then he exhorted them to follow his example. It's not by mistake that 3:1 comes after 2:16-17. What does 3:1 say? "Finally, brethren, pray for us." Who just got through praying for them in vv 16-17? Paul. So Paul takes the lead in prayer and then he says, follow me in praying for us. Paul is calling for reciprocal prayer life. I pray for you, you pray for me, I pray for you, you pray for me. Why? Because we all need prayer for something, none of us is without need for prayer, we all need God's enabling grace.



And so Paul prays, verse 16, **Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.** Now this is a very complex prayer, it has addressees, Paul addresses someone or someone's plural in prayer, it has a basis for the prayer and it has the actual request at the end. And at least the first two parts are very complex theologically. In the first part Paul addresses more than one person in the Godhead in this prayer. In the second part he summarizes central theological truths as the basis of his prayer. But without seeing the original text it's hard to see. So I'm going to show you the original text and my translation of this text so as to help you see that we are dealing with a highly complex theology in this prayer.

First you'll see the word *autos*, translated **Himself**, that's a singular personal pronoun that sits in the emphatic position, the first place in the sentence. Pronouns are substitutes for nouns. So what noun is the pronoun **Himself** substituting for? That's the grammatical stumper. Clearly I think **the Lord Jesus Christ**, it's the nearest antecedent and it agrees grammatically, but so does **God our Father**. So does the personal pronoun **Himself** refer to **the Lord Jesus Christ** only or does it refer to **the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father**? It seems to refer to both for reasons I'll explain when we get to the verbs. There's more to this argument. So for now just go along with the conclusion that both **the Lord Jesus Christ** and **God our Father** are **Himself**. You'd think it would be plural, "themselves," but it's not, they are both referred to as **Himself**. So we have a weird grammar here that has implications for how you view God. How can you have a plurality of persons referred to as a singular person? That doesn't agree. Right, it doesn't. But that's how you would do it if you wanted to express that in the singular Godhead there is a plurality. It's how you would express a Trinitarian theology. If you wanted to show that there was unity and diversity in the Godhead, you would use a singularity, **Himself**, and a plurality of persons, **the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father**. So that's the first evidence in this passage for trinitarianism; a singular pronoun referring to two nouns; **Himself**, that is, **the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father**.

Second, there is more evidence for Trinitarianism because the two verbs that follow **the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father...has loved us and has given us** are both verbs in the singular. So now we have two subjects, a

plurality, united in doing singular things. Both **the Lord Jesus Christ** and **God our Father has loved** and they both **has given**. Sounds strange but I'm trying to reflect the grammar. Something is going on here. Interestingly, the singular verbs do agree grammatically with the emphatic singular pronoun **Himself**. So the shift in the sentence is from unity to diversity and back to unity. Very strange things in this verse, very strange grammar. I've never seen a verse with this strangeness of grammar. I've seen some strange things but I've never seen this strange. And what it is is Trinitarian grammar. It's God, reaching down through limited, created human language and teaching us truths about His unlimited, uncreated person. God created human language with the capacity to teach us about Himself, a very major point in theology today. Human language is God's condescension to us to explain Himself so we can know Him. Human language does not cut us off from God, it actually is what connects us with God. So never, ever downplay language for feelings and emotions. You don't feel God, you hear God, God speaks, verbally, plainly with grammar and syntax.

Now there's more to this, but our main points are that Paul's conception of God is that He is a unity of essence, there is a diversity of person and these persons have a unity of purpose, they both **loved us and gave us**. And if you're having a hard time with this, join the club, this is tough stuff, but this is what the text says and so we have to face it.

Now we come to more tough stuff. This prayer is packed with central elements of Paul's theology. These two verbs in v 16 summarize the heart of Paul's theology. And you're going to see that some of your favorite verses, probably verses you've memorized, use these two verbs, love and give. You'll be shocked to see how much Paul's theology is wrapped up in these two verbs.

Paul's concept of the Trinity is that both the **Lord Jesus Christ** and **God our Father has loved us and has given us eternal comfort**. And if that is true then we ought to find other passages in Paul where **the Lord Jesus Christ** has loved us and where **God our Father** has loved us. And we ought to find other passages in Paul where **the Lord Jesus Christ** has given us and where **God our Father** has given us, so that the distinct persons are united in these actions.



Let's turn to the most famous one, John 3:16. And we'll make a chart to summarize these evidences.

|              | <b>FATHER</b>   | <b>SON</b>             |
|--------------|---|------------------------|
| <b>LOVES</b> | John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 8:39; 1 John 4:10                   | Gal 2:20; Rom 8:35, 37 |
| <b>GIVES</b> | John 3:16; Rom 5:8 (implied); 1 John 4:10; Rom 8:32; 39 | Gal 2:20               |

Chart: Trinitarianism evidenced by Father and Son united in identical actions.

Maybe you noticed, maybe you didn't but John 3:16 really is a great verse. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Observe God loved and God gave. And when God stands alone like this in the NT it always refers to the Father. It doesn't say anything here about the Son loving and the Son giving but it does show the Father loving and the Father giving. And what He is loving and what He is giving both relate to salvation in the Son. He's giving His own Son, that's how He loved us.

Next turn to Rom 5:8. Romans is Paul's great theological treatise on the righteousness of God. It answers the problem of how does God remain righteous while justifying sinners. And we find in Rom 5:8 "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It doesn't say He gave us Christ but it's implied that He did and that this manifests His love for us. So it's the same point of John 3:16, that His love is expressed by giving His Son for us. How does God love us? By giving us His Son for us in salvation.

Now turn over to 1 John 4:10, these are all the Father, we're looking first at the Father, then we'll turn to the Son and see if the Son does the same things the Father does. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us

and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.” Love starts with God, it doesn’t start with man, it starts with God. How did God love us? By sending His son to be the propitiation for our sins. And it goes on to the logical conclusion in verse 11 for our love. So again and again and again the NT says that God the Father gave us His Son in relation to salvation, and that this is a manifestation of His love.

Now we want to turn to the Son. Does the Son do the same things as the Father? Does the Son both give and love? Answer Gal 2:20, another one of the great passages in the NT, every verse I’m mentioning are verses Christians have memorized generation after generation because they carry the riches of salvation. And here’s another one, this one does what the prayer in 2 Thessalonians does - it starts with the basis of our salvation in the past and moves to the experience of our salvation in the present. Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ;” that’s the past, “and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;” he’s shifted to the present, “and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Right at the end, what did the Son of God do for Paul and for you and for me? He loved you and He gave Himself up for you. There it is, the Son both loved and gave. And again it’s related to salvation.

So now we have both the Father and the Son loving and giving, and that all comes together in 2 Thess 2:16 because it’s both the Father and the Son united in their action of loving and giving. That has tremendous repercussions for the ontological status of the Father and the Son. Paul’s putting them on an equal level ontologically, that is, as far as being is concerned, as far as essence is concerned, the Father and the Son are one and the same, they are the one true God, they each have all the attributes of God. And of course they are also distinct, the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father, but the Father and the Son are God.

Finally, to see this once more turn to Rom 8:32; another great and central Pauline passage. We could spend all day on some of these but we’re just looking for the united action of the Father and the Son and this passage gives quite a bit of evidence. Verse 32, “He who did not spare His own Son,” that’s the Father, “but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” So there’s the Father giving us the Son. Verse 33, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies;

<sup>34</sup>who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of” who? “the love of Christ?” There’s the Son loving us. “Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>Just as it is written, “FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.” <sup>37</sup>But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” There’s the Son again, “who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God,” now we add the love of God, which is the Father, “which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Which implies the Son is His gift to us. So that covers a lot of Pauline theology and the central components of Paul’s theology, the Trinitarian God both loves and gives and it’s on that basis that we pray.

So let’s go back to Paul’s prayer in 2 Thess 2:16-17 where he’s summarizing all this great theology as the basis of his prayer and we’ll go on to the actual request. Not only did God love us by giving us salvation through the Son who loved us and gave Himself up for us but how does 2 Thessalonians 2:16 express it? It expresses it from our standpoint as recipients? **By grace** and I would put that up front here because everything that follows is a product of His grace. **By grace He gave us eternal comfort and good hope**, it’s all by grace; we didn’t merit this, it’s by His freely bestowing them on us. What did he bestow on us? Two things; **eternal comfort and good hope**. These are past gifts by the way, they’re aorist tenses and you received them the moment you were saved by grace through faith.

The first thing you received at that moment in time is **eternal comfort**. What this is is Paul’s way of saying eternal security. Actually quite fascinating because what does eternal security do for you except give you eternal comfort. Think about it, if you’re secure then what else are you? You’re comfortable, you can relax. From the moment you trusted Christ to the end of your life and for all time Paul says you can relax. Why? Because you’re eternally secure. If you’re not eternally secure then you can’t relax, you better get to work, make sure you really are saved! Paul didn’t believe any of that. Paul believed what we read in Romans 8, that nothing can separate you from the love of Christ. Paul believed what Jesus said in John 10, “I give

eternal life to My sheep and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." Do the Father and the Son want you to have eternal comfort? Do they want you to know you are saved and have security in Him? Absolutely. How can you relax if you're always wondering, did I really believe, am I really saved? Baloney, the Father and the Son want us to know we are saved so that out of gratitude to Him for saving us we can operate for His glory. We have **eternal comfort**. Besides, what was Paul's original purpose in the chapter anyway? To settle down their minds, to get them to relax mentally, here's a way to do it, hey you're eternally secure, relax.

And secondly in verse 16, the same day you were saved you also were given **good hope**, *elpis*, the same word used back in 1 Thess 4:13 of the rapture. We have **good hope** meaning sure expectation of the Rapture, we look forward to the blessed hope of our Lord's return for us. Talk about relaxation. Does this accomplish Paul's goal of settling their minds down? Absolutely. That's what he's praying for. Jesus taught the same comforting truth in John 14, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." What are you worried about? There's nothing to worry about. Relax. God wants you to relax and focus on what He has done for you, that's a basis for the prayer request that comes next. How can you pray for anything and expect God to answer if you're not sure you're saved and God has secured you're destiny?

So Paul requests, verse 16, **Now may Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father...**verse 17, **comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.** two verbs, both in the optative mood which is very rare in the NT, he's wishing for the future that the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father in unity would **comfort and strengthen their hearts**. And both of these verbs are inner words, they relate to the inner man, to the thinking part of man, the **heart**, the intellectual center where if we are disturbed our thoughts circulate and cause emotional and psychological distress. So he's going to the heart of the problem which is the **heart**, the mind, the thinking center and he's praying for **comfort**, *parakalesai*, for God

to come alongside of their thinking center and give them assurance, comfort them. And two, **strength**, *sterizai*, for God to cause their thinking to be firm, to be committed to the truth.

And why? Paul says, **in every good work and word**, but what he's talking about is "toward every good work and word," toward that end, toward the end that you are able to function as a Christian and produce good works and good words. That's the prayer. Paul is interested ultimately in fruitfulness as a Christian. And he knows that for there to be fruit there has to be strong thinking, not doubts circulating in our hearts, but confidence that this book is the truth. And only God can give that. As the word is taught God works so as to dismantle our doubts and firm us up, strengthen us in our thinking so that we have a firm basis for doing good works and saying good words.

And so Paul has come full circle in this chapter. He has started with Christians whose minds were unsettled by false doctrine, he has corrected that false doctrine with the truth, he has thanked God for having a before time plan for saving them and a destiny to be resurrected at the rapture; he has exhorted them to stand firm and hold on to the truth and he has now prayed for these things to be made effectual by the exercise of the Triune God's will so that they are comforted and strengthened in the inner man so that they may do good works and good words in all confidence. Paul's end is always spiritual growth and the production of fruit for the glory of God.

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