

A PRAYER FOR ASSURANCE AND LOVE IN THE LIGHT OF THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

I Thessalonians 3:9-13 The Prayers of Paul GTBC Kevin S Lucas, Bible Teacher

Context: The history of Paul's _____ among the Thessalonian believers lies at the _____ of this prayer.

- During a very brief stay in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul had been very successful among the _____ of the city, but the Jews made remaining in Thessalonica nigh-well impossible.
- Less than a month does not seem like enough time to _____ a stable church, even though some of the Jews with strong backgrounds in the Old Testament could easily plug-in what they knew about _____ from the Scriptures and combine it with the teaching of _____.
- There had been great persecution and much hatred and anger within the city. Paul and his team were hustled out of town, yet the persecution did not cease.
- Paul explains his anxiety and his action in dispatching _____ back to Thessalonica from Berea because of his concern for the believers in the new church in First Thessalonians three beginning with the first verse which gives us the immediate context of our passage today.
- Paul received good news from Timothy which directly occasioned our _____ in this study:

It is very natural for us to divide this prayer into three sections:

- THE ENTHUSIASTIC _____ OF THE PRAYER**
- THE EXPOUNDED _____ OF PAUL**
- THE EXPECTED _____ OF THE PRAYER**

I. THE ENTHUSIASTIC RENDERING OF THE PRAYER: “For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly...”

A. The _____ of the prayer has expressed in the following words: “For what thanks can we render to God for you...” The word translated “_____” here is the noun form of the Greek word εὐχαριστία (eucharistia which is a compound word from eu = “good” and christia = “to give freely” or “generously”). The word “render” here is a compound word (ἀνταποδίδωμι anti = “to replace,” “in the place of,” apo = “back,” and didomi = “to give,” so it carries the meaning of “giving back something in place of something else”). The idea here is to recompense or fully repay, but here’s the twist: rather than praying against the Jews of Thessalonica, Paul prayed to the God of heaven for those who had been remarkably saved!

B. The _____ of the prayers expressed in these words: “...for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God...” This is the reaction of Paul to the good news that Timothy brought concerning the church of Thessalonica. Paul uses two different words out of the same _____ word which are translated “joy” or “rejoicing” here in this prayer. The first word is translated “joy” and is the little Greek word χαρά (chara = “joy,” “extreme delight”). The second word is translated “rejoicing” and is the Greek word χαίρω (chairō = “rejoicing,” “being cheerful,” “happiness”) and it serves as a present active verb. The net effect of these two words is to magnify the absolute sense of privilege it is to pray for the needs of others, especially their spiritual needs, and to see those needs being met through prayer.

C. The _____ of the prayers expressed in these words: "...night and day praying exceedingly..."

- **First there is the _____ of prayer:** "...night and day praying exceedingly..."
- **Second, there is the _____ of prayer:** "...night and day *praying* exceedingly..." There are many words in the Bible for prayer. Paul here chooses δέομαι (deomai = which at its root means "a need or a longing that is best expressed in prayer to God").
- **Third, the _____ grace of prayer:** "...night and day praying *exceedingly*..." The word exceedingly is περισσῶς (perissos = "existing in abundance"). This is a word that is used to describe the number of fragments of bread left over from the feeding of the 5,000. It means more than enough and plenty to spare!

II. THE EXPOUNDED _____ OF PAUL: "...that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you..." The requests of Paul fall into two separate categories.

A. The first category is Paul's requests to God that he be personally _____ to continue their training, which had been so shortened by circumstances. Note the 3 phrases in italics: "...that *we may see your face* and perfect what is lacking in your faith? *Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.* And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, *just as we do to you...*"

1. First, Paul here requests the personal privilege of _____ his training of the Thessalonians. "...that we may see your face..." Paul uses a form of the Greek verb oida called εἶδον (eidon = "to know by perception," "to see," "to behold," "to interview," or "to come to know for myself with my own _____"). It is this latter sense that I believe Paul intends here. He knew he had started the task at the direction of the Lord. He knew that circumstances beyond his control made it difficult to finish it. And though he was never able to complete their training face-to-face, we can rejoice that the Christian world received two of its greatest epistles (I and II Thessalonians) because of the desire to finish the job he had started.

2. Second, Paul calls upon the full _____ of the Godhead to guide him back to the Thessalonians. "Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you..." This is a wonderful affirmation of the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ because of the technical grammar of this prayer. Without getting into the weeds of the detail, God is declared to be our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is given exactly the _____ status without being subordinated at all by the language. Now I suspect some of you might question why the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Divine Trinity is not mentioned here as well. For that I can give you two answers. First, the Holy Spirit is the shy member of the Trinity. He never points to Himself, but always points to the Son who then points to the Father. Thus, it would be out of character for the Holy Spirit to overtly call attention to Himself. And second, later in the prayer, the apostle Paul is going to ask that the Thessalonians be able to abound in love one to another. We know that the fruit of the Spirit (that is the fruit of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit) is love! So, the Holy Spirit is clearly here, even though He is unseen and unmentioned.

3. Paul hints at why he wanted to _____ return to Thessalonica: “...just as we do to you...”. The apostle Paul knew that he could and would express his super abounding love for them at a distance through letters, but there is nothing like seeing truth _____ in the flesh. When God wanted to express Himself completely to man, He sent us His matchless Word which will endure for all eternity. But God did not think that this was enough, and so the Inspired Word became the incarnate Word when the Word became flesh (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1–2a, NKJV). The Lord Jesus Christ was God’s ultimate message to man, modeling the truth of God in human flesh. This is EXACTLY what Paul, as an imitator of Christ, desired to do. And of course, this should be our desire as well, not only to know the truth, but to model the truth that we know so that others may more easily see it.

B. The second category was Paul’s to request to God for the Thessalonian _____: “...that we may see your face *and perfect what is lacking in your faith?* Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. *And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you...*”

1. The first is Paul’s request for the proper _____ because of the lack in the Thessalonian church. “...that we may see your face *and perfect what is lacking in your faith?*” Paul is discussing their “faith” (πίστις *pistis*) and the word here probably means “assurance.” They had abundant evidence of true saving faith, and doctrinally this church seems remarkably grounded for a church that had Paul in its orbit for only a month or less. Later questions about practical matters and the nature of the Second Coming seem to indicate that this was a church that needed some assurance. And why not? They had been persecuted severely and some of their members had died after Paul left. This is a church that needed a “faith lift.”

Notice what Paul wants God to do for them. He wants God to “perfect” (καταρτίζω *katartizoo* = can mean the “mending of broken nets” or “broken bones,” but here probably is used in a more specialized sense as “completely equipping”) their faith. This Greek term is often used in a nautical sense and refers to “outfitting” a ship for sailing. In this sense the ship is given everything that it needs for the journey ahead. Thus, Paul wants to give the Thessalonian believers everything they will need for the future. Why did he make such a request? From the context, he was doing so that they may be supplied with “what is lacking in your faith.” The word for “lacking” is ὑστέρημα (“hysterama” from which we get our word “hysteria”) In this context it means “whatever might not be completely full.” If the ship of faith is to sail it needs to be outfitted with everything that it needs, and its holds filled to the brim with all that is needed or wanted. This is what God wants to do with us as believers, and we can get that equipment and filling wherever the Bible is carefully and plainly taught, like Grace and Truth Bible Church!

2. The second is Paul’s request for the proper _____ of love in the Thessalonian church. “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all...” Our Lord said this about how to _____ a real disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35, NKJV) The Holy Spirit produces this love is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22–23, NKJV) Producing this love in

a difficult environment is part of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians and three things are clearly in view here.

a. The _____ of this love: "the Lord." This is not a man-made love. It cannot be produced by human effort. Only union with the source of love, the Lord Jesus Christ, can produce such love!

b. The _____ of this love: "...make you increase and abound in love..." Two words stand out in this passage - "increase" and "abound." The word translated "increase" is the Greek word πλεονάζω (pleonazoo) which speaks of an "overflowing" or "super-abounding" love. It is a love that has escaped its banks like a raging river. We've seen the word "abound" before. It is the same word translated "exceedingly" earlier in the prayer, and we discovered it meant to exist in abundance like the fragments of the bread that were left over from the feeding of the 5,000. What a supply of love!

c. The _____ of this love: "...to one another and to all..." Prayer begins in the household of faith among fellow believers. But the love referred to here reaches out to all men, even to those who are our enemies. This is the genuine Christian love for which Paul prayed.

III. THE EXPECTED _____ OF THE PRAYER: "...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." The words "so that" are clearly signaling that this is the expected result for the outcome of Paul's prayer.

A. First, there is the _____: "...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father..." Paul wants God to establish (στηρίζω sterizo = meaning "to fix," "set fast," or most probably here "anchor") or anchor their hearts (innermost being) unblameable (ἄμemptος amemptos) meaning "finding no faults or flaws" in holiness (separation from sin and positively endued with God's holy standing. Paul is praying that their earthly walk will match their heavenly standard as God takes His word and conforms us to the image of His Son with it.

B. Second, there is the _____: "...at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." The word "coming" is παρουσία (parousia) which is one of the terms for the Rapture of the Church. The ultimate goal of all our growth and discipleship is to be ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ at any time. Let us allow God to conform us to the image of Christ and His character as we await His return from heaven.