



More Expressions of Affection - Prayer for Them

1 Thessalonians 3:10-13

1. Paul's Habitual Prayers (verse 10)
2. Paul's Actual Prayer (verses 11-13)

As is our custom, I would invite you to open in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3. Tonight, we are going to finish this chapter. In finishing the chapter, we are going to finish the 1st major section of the letter. The first section includes chapters 1-3. The second section includes the final two chapters, chapters 4-5.

The first three chapters focus our attention on Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians. It's main intent is to describe his genuine, pastoral concern for them. If you would like a title for these chapters, I would suggest that we entitle it, "Pastoral Concern." When we get into chapters 4 and 5, the emphasis is going to be upon "Pastoral Instruction" - that is, what you are to do.

By the way, this deviates from Paul's normal practice of teaching great doctrines of the faith in the first half of the epistle, while focussing on the instructions in the latter half. In this Epistle, Paul dealt more with his ministry while among them, rather than the great truths of God.

We have seen the focus of Paul in the first 3 chapters to be upon two predominant themes:

1. His Thankfulness to God for them (1; 2:13-16)
2. His Affection for them. (2:1-12; 2:17-3:13)

In past weeks, we have really been constructing for ourselves, a brief pastoral theology. Perhaps it has done me more good than it has done for you all. But let me tell you that I have been greatly challenged by the things that Paul has written in this letter. I have been challenged to respond in my ministry to you all and I have seen my great lack in this area. If one would set about the task of writing a book, or an instruction manual on how to be a pastor of a church, perhaps one chapter might be filled with what we have learned from chapters 1-3. This is the power of exposition. We see things as God inspired them.

Here is what we have discerned from this epistle: A pastor must exhibit two great attitudes toward his people ...

1. Thankfulness to God
2. Affection toward the people.

I know that I need to be thankful for all that God has done and is doing in your lives. And indeed, I am. I know that I need to be affectionate toward you all. Indeed, my desire is like Paul -- I want to be with you more. It was good to be with one family for lunch this afternoon. Yvonne and I have had many discussions about how we can seek to promote in the future the ability to be with each other, and thus encourage and strengthen each other. We have talked about ways in which we can systematically have each of you and your families into our home.

We must see that this isn't so what a pastor must do, as a pastor, it is what he must **feel**. These are the feelings that a pastor must have. He must be thankful He must have an affection toward his people. This is the **spirit** in which he must minister.

In all of his activities of leading and overseeing the flock, encouraging the flock, feeding the flock, administrating the flock, guarding the flock, training men to disciple, reproduce, and replace himself, a pastor cannot do so apart from a thankfulness to God for what He has done in the lives of the people. Nor can he labor apart from a genuine affection and care for the people.

This is what Peter told the elders to do, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to [the will of] God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter. 5:2-3). Notice the descriptions, "voluntarily," "with eagerness," "as examples."

The pastor will minister voluntarily, with eagerness, and as an example when he is thankful to God and has an affection for the people in the flock. Charles Bridges, in his great work, *The Christian Ministry*, outlines this very sentiment, when he affirms, "I would have every Minister of the Gospel address his audience with the zeal of a friend, with a generous energy of a father, and with the exuberant affection of a mother" (quoting Fenelon). Bridges continues, ... "We might also bring before the [congregation] from time to time, our remembrance of them in our prayers and thanksgivings, our tender interest in their welfare, our devotedness to their service, our ardent longing for their Christian advancement, and the strong connection of their prosperity with our own happiness. Such a spirit will contribute most beneficially to cement the bond between us." (pp. 334-5).

Let me also mention, that our brief look into a pastoral theology has come about, not because Paul gave instructions or commands about pastoral ministry. Rather, our theology has come about because of the example of Paul in the ministry.

We have essentially taken Paul's advice, to "be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1) and to "join in following my example" (Phil. 3:17), I believe that we are warranted in doing so, because Paul was given to the church as an apostle to instruct, lead, and guide the church. He did this by what he taught and by what he did.

So tonight, with that as a brief introduction, I direct your attention to the scriptures. Allow me to read for you our text tonight.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

(6) "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, (7) for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; (8) for now we [really] live, if you stand firm in the Lord. (9) For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, (10) as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? (11) Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; (12) and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also [do] for you; (13) so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."

Last week, we left off in verse 9, and tonight we will begin in verse 10. My wife asked me why I would begin a new section here in verse 10. We see that verse 10 starts with a dependent clause (i.e. a portion of a sentence which is dependent upon the main thought of the sentence). This is something I don't like to do, but it does keep our subject unified tonight.

(Again, for you who are English challenged, let me explain what I mean by a dependent clause. Every sentence in the English language has a simple sentence in it. Everything else surrounding it is another part of speech, somehow modifying the main thought.. For example, (and I pick a sentence from my son's vocabulary). "My car wiped out when it went over the ramp I built." The main sentence is, "The car wiped out." The clause in this sentence is, "when it went over the ramp I built." The emphasis isn't upon the car going over the ramp. The emphasis is upon the car wiping out (which is important for little children).

So likewise, when we look at verses 9 and 10, we read, (verse 9) [Main sentence, main thought] - "For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account," (verse 10) [Dependent clause, dependent thought] - "as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we might see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?"

Though verse 10 is a dependent thought, we begin at verse 10 tonight, because it introduces the thought in verses 11-13 and because it contains the same thought as verses 11-13. You ask, "What is the main thought in this passage?" My answer, "A Pastor's Prayer."

In chapter 1, verse 2, we hear about Paul praying constantly for the Thessalonians, in these verses, we are going to get a glimpse into the content of his prayers. As I fit these verses into the context of what I have called, "More Expressions of Affection," may I simply point out, that you pray most for those you dearly love. It is those whom you love who are on your heart and prayer for them is easily made.

Are you like me? Do you find yourself praying more for yourself and for your family than for others? Listen, it is a display of affection to pray for another. Why is it that "the family that prays together, stays together"? One of the reasons is because prayer is a means of expressing one's affection toward another. Why is it that marital problems are greatly reduced, when husband and wife pray regularly for and with one another? Again, it is a display of affection for each other.

May I say that there is great application here for us tonight. Paul's example in prayer out to stimulate us in our prayer life. And let me ask you this evening, "who among you are completely satisfied with your prayers?" Every time the Bible speaks of praying, I am convicted in my own heart for my own lack of prayer. I think that prayer is like this. No matter how much we pray, we will always feel the tug to pray more.

So, we finally get to the text tonight.

To divide these verses, we find verse 10 describing Paul's habitual prayers, which he constantly makes before the throne of grace. Verses 11-13 containing in written form, an actual prayer of Paul. We will find that Paul essentially says the same thing in each of these verses.

For the sake of having some structure to our thoughts tonight, let me outline this passage by using two points ...

1. Paul's Habitual Prayers (verse 10)
2. Paul's Actual Prayer (verses 11-13)

Let's look first at ...

1. Paul's Habitual Prayers (verse 10)

Notice how general verse 10 is, "as we night and day keep praying most earnestly" When Paul says that he is "**praying**," he uses the present participle ("ing" ending) to describe this action, which, I am sure that many of you know is emphasizing his continual action. Paul says that his prayers were frequent.

He uses another phrase to represent how **frequent** his prayers were. He was praying "night and day." In other words, he was praying "all the

time." The idea here, of course, isn't that Paul never slept and that he did nothing but pray for the Thessalonians. (You remember that he was in Corinth, establishing the church there). No, the idea here is that the Thessalonians were constantly on his mind. Whether it was day or night. The idea here is nothing more than what Paul commanded in 1 Thess. 5:17 - "Pray without ceasing."

One man said that, "a minister of God always live in the Spirit of prayer. ... As breathing, so ought praying to be - that continual, life giving activity that must go on and on and on and on throughout the day. ... As you think, you ought to pray."

First thing when you get up... you ought to pray. As Robert Murray M'Cheyne has said, "Never see the face of man till you have seen His face who is our life, our all." Throughout the day ... you ought to pray As the Psalmist says, "Seven times a day I praise Thee" (Ps. 119:164). Last thing when you go to bed ... you ought to pray. Psalm 141:2, "May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering."

But more than the frequency of his prayers, Paul makes known the **fervency** of his prayers, "as we night and day keep praying most earnestly." The word translated "most earnestly" is a very interesting word. It is one of those words that I think that Paul made up in an effort to express his great passion and fervor, by which he prayed. Literally, it means, "super-exceeding-abundantly."

To quote J. C. Ryle, he said, "I commend to you the importance of earnestness in prayer. It is not that a person should shout, or scream, or be very loud, in order to prove that they are in earnest. But it is desirable that we should be hearty and fervent and warm, and ask as if we were really interested in what we were doing. It is the "effectual fervent" prayer that "avails much." To quote Edward Payson, "You cannot make a man that is full cry for food like one that is hungry: no more will a man who has a good opinions of himself cry for mercy like one who feels that he is poor and needy." I would add, "Nor can you make someone who doesn't have great love for another pray fervently for them."

At this point, I say, we ought to repent right now for our lukewarm prayers before God. It was the early church that was fervently devoted to prayer. I could tell you of example after example after example of those who prayed fervently and saw God work in mighty ways. I commend you to the biographies of George Mueller, David Brainerd, Hudson Taylor, ... I commend to you the works of Andrew Murray, E. M. Bounds, ...

But, I believe that here is the point. Paul had a great affection and love for the Thessalonians. He could do nothing but pray. So, I believe that to pray effectually and fervently, we need to have great affection for what we pray for.

Have you seen others so involved and saturated with something (be it good or bad, be it a club, be it an activity, be it entertainment, be it their work, ...) that they do nothing but talk about it. So likewise, pray to God that he would give you an earnest love for and affection toward God's people, and you will find yourself praying fervently for them.

We have seen the frequency and fervency of Paul's habit of praying for the Thessalonians. Let's look now at the content of his praying for the Thessalonians. If you look in verse 10, there are really two guiding prayer requests: (1) that we may see your face and (2) that we may complete what is lacking in your faith.

The first of these prayer requests that Paul has been continually making is nothing new from what we have seen.

"... we were all the more eager with great desire to see your face" (2:17).

"For we wanted to come ... more than once" (2:18).

"when we could endure [the separation] no longer" (3:1).

"when I could endure it no longer" (3:5).

"just as we long to see you"(3:6).

"As we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face" (3:10).

"Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; (3:11)

The point here is that Paul has been praying for this. He wants to be with them. Shepherding the people in Thessalonica from Corinth, just isn't working. I read in the news yesterday how Michael Jordan is seeking to manage the Washington Wizards from his home in Chicago, miles away. Some have accused him of not caring for his team. Paul wanted to be with the Thessalonians.

But he wanted to be with them with a purpose: that we may complete what is lacking in your faith. They had faith, but they lacked. These Thessalonians were like the man who cried out to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). These Thessalonians were like the disciples, whom Jesus rebuked for having little faith. Jesus said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there and it shall move.'" (Matt. 17:20). These Thessalonians were like us -- lacking in faith.

They were not like the Israelites, who didn't attain righteousness, because they did not pursue it by faith. (Rom. 9:32; Heb. 4:2). No, these Thessalonians had a faith, but there was something lacking, which needed to be filled. Literally, it needed to be mended, like nets (Mark 1:19). Their faith needed to be equipped (Eph. 4:12).

When we get to chapter 4, we will see some ways in which the Thessalonians were lacking in their faith. We will find that they were acting like Christians to some degree, but he is going to urge them to "excel still more" (4:1,10). That is the outworking of the faith. There is a level of faith that is possessed, but it needs to grow.

This week, I heard John Piper preach about this from Hebrews 3:13, "Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. He exhorted those present to make it a community effort to encourage other believers in their walks with Jesus Christ. John Piper wrote, "We fight to maintain each other's faith, by speaking words that point people to the truth and value of Jesus. That's how you guard against an evil heart of unbelief. Unbelief means failing to rest in Jesus as your

greatest treasure. So helping each other believe means showing people reasons why Jesus is more to be desired and trusted and loved than anything else."

I thought how important it is for us to be together and encourage one another. I thought how important it is for us to be concerned about one another. Decide today that when you see one begin to stray from the truth, you will do what is in your power to "encourage this one day after day ... lest this one be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:13).

Will you do that with me? Will Rock Valley Bible Church be characterized by those in the congregation who encourage one another in the faith? Or will Rock Valley Bible Church fail in the diligence to encourage each other?

Listen, I'm not talking about leaving our church. Many churches will place great pressure on others for leaving their church to join another. Quite frankly, we won't ever be the perfect church for everybody. We'll try, but we won't get there. However, I am talking about someone leaving the faith. You need to do all in your power to encourage that person, "lest he/she be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." I would so much long to see this be a place where this authentically happens. A place where each of us has our eyes on who we can encourage.

We have seen Paul tell the Thessalonians of his habitual prayers (1:2-4; 3:9-10). And now, beginning in verse 11, he writes down an actual prayer.

2. Paul's Actual Prayer (verses 11-13)

So much of his actual prayer is nothing more than a repetition of what he said he continually prayed for. This shouldn't shock us. It should be exactly what we expect. Paul said that he prayed for them frequently and fervently. Now, he prays for them.

Again, Paul makes two requests, which are identical to the two things he mentioned in verse 10. The first is found in verse 11, "Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you." This is similar to his prayer request in verse 10, "we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face." Paul simply prayed that God would enable him to come and be with the Thessalonians. He prayed for all road-blocks to be removed. He prayed for the hindrances that Satan had established to be brought down (2:17). Notice that he didn't rebuke Satan or bind Satan, like so many on television are doing today. When Satan had thwarted Paul's efforts, Paul prayed for God to intervene.

There isn't much more to speak about concerning this verse. Only to say, by way of footnote, that a strong proof for the deity of Christ occurs in this verse: though Paul prays to "our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord," he uses a singular verb, "may direct our way to you."

Enough of the first request, let's look at the second. The second request is stated in verse 12, "and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you." The request is simple enough. Paul is praying to God that the Thessalonians would see their love for others increase.

This is nothing more than what he exhorts them to do in 4:9-10. "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more" (4:9-10).

This is the Christian life -- Love. It doesn't take much to justify this Biblically. Whether it's Jesus, or Paul, or John, or Peter, or the Prophets, or Moses, ... They are all united. You will express your faith in God through your love of others.

Husbands, you will express your spirituality when you love your wife, like Christ loved the church. Wives, you will express your spirituality when you love your husbands. John called it, "the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." (1 John 3:11). We will be spiritual when we love one another. In Romans, perhaps this is best shown, when Paul writes, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled [the] law. For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of [the] law" (Romans 13:8-10).

Perhaps you find it easy this evening to love your brethren because you look around and you know everybody, and you like everybody. They are easy to love. Well, what will happen when you encounter somebody in the church that you don't like and whom you find difficult to love? What then? Am I the only one who has experienced this? Unlovable people, in the church? Yes, unlovable people in the church!

What will happen when you experience unlovable people? You will do one of two things ...

1. Either the deceitfulness of sin will harden your heart and you will be hardened in your faith as a result of your lack of love. Your lack of love will affect your faith. It always happens this way. Sin leads to unbelief. Or ...

2. God will give you the power to love. Is this not the trust of the gospel, that "he who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it"? (Phil. 1:6). This is the very thing that Paul prays here -- for God causing another to love. "May the Lord **cause** you to increase and abound in love for one another," This sounds just like Peter, when he wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1:3).

Though there isn't a Greek word in each of these cases to correspond to the word, "cause," it is implied in the tense of each verse. Salvation is a work of God - it is he who causes us to be born again. Sanctification is a work of God - it is he who gives the increase and abounding in our zeal to pursue righteousness. Salvation and Sanctification are both entirely a

work of God. This was brought home to me about 10 years ago, when a pastor, whom I greatly admired, was asked to explain his godliness and his zeal. He said that "the Lord has given it to me."

Yet, I would remind you, that we are exhorted to have faith - "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Yet, I would remind you, that we are exhorted to love - "excel still more." But realize, in all of your efforts to believe and love, it is God who enables and empowers!

Let's look at the next verse, verse 13. I have jumped forward to talk about our sanctification in verse 12, precisely because verse 13 speaks about it. Paul writes in verse 13, "so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness (or sanctification) before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints." This verse explains Paul's final purpose in praying such. He isn't praying for people to love, so that we would all be a big, happy family. It isn't the, "Can't we all, just get along?" thing.

Yesterday in Men's Equippers, we were discussing the purpose of evangelism. The ultimate purpose for which we proclaim the message of Christ to a dying world: praise and worship to God. Our purpose in our proclamation is **not** to win others, so that they can proclaim the message also. That is an endless cycle which is pointless. On the contrary, our purpose in our proclamation is to bring others to be true worshippers of Him. (Romans 15:8-13).

So likewise, when Paul prays for the Thessalonians to increase and abound in their love for one another, he doesn't say, "so that you will be united with one another and have great fellowship with one another." Rather, he prays, "so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness" (verse 13). Here is the connection. As we walk in love, we are established in holiness.

Notice again, however, that it is not we, ourselves, who will make us holy. No, look at the subject of this verse: "so that **He** may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness." Listen, when you ultimately stand before God, you are never going to be able to claim unblamable holiness before Him on your own merits. (unblamable is equivalent to having no grounds of accusation). But Paul is praying here that as God causes us to increase and abound in our love for one another, God will establish our hearts as holy before Him.

The picture here is of judgment day, when we will stand before God. Paul tells us that we will be with all His saints. Paul prays that we will be found blameless before Him on that day. We see this as an often repeated theme in the scripture - that the church of Jesus Christ will stand before God as a blameless and spotless before Him. We will be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:25-27). "Now unto Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 24).

What a glorious day that will be. But our sanctification in the future, is entirely connected with the present. Our holiness then, is connected with our love now! And God is in control of it all! As I said earlier, we are finishing up the first section of this epistle (chapters 1-3 - Pastoral Concern; chapters 4-5 - Pastoral Exhortation).

I would like for you to notice how Paul ends the second section of his letter. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass" (1 Thess. 5:23-24). In both sections, he ends with a prayer. Both prayers begin the same way, "Now, may God Himself ..." Both prayers are for the same thing - our sanctification on that day we stand before Him.

This prayer is for **me**! Please pray this for **me**! This prayer is for **us**!

Lest you think that you don't need to grow in this area, let me ask you if you have a genuine love for one another (in this room, tonight).
Lest you think that you don't need to grow in this area, let me ask you if you have a genuine love for all men (each and every person you know - not generalized).
Lest you think that you don't need to grow in this area, let me ask you if your genuine love for all men cannot increase any more than it does today.
Lest you think that you don't need to grow in this area, let me ask you if your genuine love for all men cannot abound any more than it does today.
Lest you think that you don't need to grow in this area, let me ask you if your heart is already unblamable in holiness before God.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 11, 2001 by Steve Brandon.
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