

Bible Study for February 23rd

Paul had preached in Thessalonica and seen those believers established in the faith. He is writing back to this new congregation of believers, less than a year old. They were experiencing fierce persecution. But Paul's desire for them was not that they escape persecution, or that they would have a church building, or any of the other things we might think he should have been concerned about. His concern was for their spiritual well-being.

Weekly Bible study meets each Tuesday (except following a holiday) and Thursday in Capitol Annex Room 436 from 11:30 am till noon. It is the same study both days to allow flexibility for committee schedules.

A Desire for Persevering Faith

There was a fear that the many afflictions and persecutions experienced by the young Thessalonian church might cause the church not to persevere in faith. Paul's concern is not that the persecution cease, that is an unrealistic expectation in the New Testament world where a small minority of believers in Jesus are hated for their allegiance to Christ. Paul has obvious concern for these believers, but his greatest concern is for their continued faith in the Lord Jesus.

A Desire for Increasing Love

In verses 11-13, we see a prayer by Paul for the Thessalonians. Paul can't go to the Thessalonians, but he can pray for them. Are you separated by distance from family members and friends who you are concerned about? You can pray! God is able to work wherever they are. Paul realizes that all his desires and efforts for the Thessalonians won't result in anything apart from the work of God for them. Therefore, he prays!

Prayer is an expression of faith in a sovereign God. Prayer is an expression of faith in a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. This God does intervene in the affairs of men. He does heal. He does give spiritual life. He does cause people to grow in holiness.

The kinds of things Paul prays for the Thessalonians are things that cannot be produced by man, only God can do them. Only the Holy Spirit can cause believers to increase in love for one another and to grow in holiness.

Paul's desire is for the congregation to increase in love for one another. This is a frequent command in the New Testament. Jesus had given this new commandment to His disciples in the Upper Room the night before He was crucified. He told them that "by this all men would know that they were His disciples." The Apostle John added that no one can say they love God and hate their brother. If we love God, we will love our brothers and sisters in Christ also. Paul prays that their love will increase for one another.

A Desire for Growing Holiness

Paul prays for the Thessalonians' holiness. Peter repeats God's command to Israel to the New Testament church, "Be holy as I am holy." The author of Hebrews says, "Strive ... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." In the next chapter, Paul will remind the Thessalonians "This is God's Will, your sanctification." 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

Sanctification is the process of being set apart unto holiness. This is God's will for your life, believer! You are to be growing in holiness! Another way of putting this is that we are to be growing to be more and more like Jesus. God predestined us for this purpose, Romans 8:29. But He has also ordained the means.

Philippians 2:12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The Word of God is an instrument in our growth in holiness to help us be conformed to the image of Christ (see Eph. 4:12ff). And here, prayer is seen to be a means of our holiness. We are to pray for it ourselves and to pray for it for others, as Paul does here.

Conclusion

"Purification," *Valley of Vision*

LORD JESUS,

I sin — Grant that I may

never cease grieving because of it,

never be content with myself,

never think I can reach a point of perfection.

Kill my envy, command my tongue,

trample down self.

Give me grace to be holy, kind, gentle, pure,

peaceable,

to live for thee and not for self,

to copy thy words, acts, spirit,

to be transformed into thy likeness,

to be consecrated wholly to thee,

to live entirely to thy glory.

Deliver me from attachment to things unclean,

from wrong associations,

from the predominance of evil passions,

from the sugar of sin as well as its gall,

that with self-loathing, deep contrition,

earnest heart searching

I may come to thee, cast myself on thee,

trust in thee, cry to thee,

be delivered by thee.

O God, the Eternal All, help me to know that

all things are shadows, but thou art substance,

all things are quicksands, but thou art mountain,

all things are shifting, but thou art anchor,

all things are ignorance, but thou art wisdom.

If my life is to be a crucible amid burning heat,

so be it,

but do thou sit at the furnace mouth

to watch the ore that nothing be lost.

If I sin wilfully, grievously, tormentedly,

in grace take away my mourning

and give me music;

remove my sackcloth

and clothe me with beauty;

still my sighs

and fill my mouth with song,

then give me summer weather as a Christian.

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