

1st Thessalonians 1: 2-4; “The Missionary’s Prayers & Ours”, A Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall in the Morning Worship Service, on June 13th, 2021, the day when Missionary Trevor Johnson visited us.

So we want to look at the prayers which were made by the apostle Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, for the church at Thessalonica. What did those prayers consist of? Well Paul tells us that they consisted of 3 activities of their minds and hearts. 1st of all – Giving thanks. 2nd – Making mention of all those that they knew in the church. And 3rd – Remembering the spiritual work of these believers without ceasing. This is what these missionary men prayed for. But it is also the best of spiritual activities that we can engage in as well, if we would deepen our own prayer life. We will consider these 3 spiritual activities in relation to prayer, from a personal standpoint.

1st of all – The Missionary’s Prayer and our Prayers should consist of Giving Thanks to God always for all of the saints in a local church. (verse 2)

“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.” We see here from this verse that Paul and Silvanus and Timothy were not only men who planted churches. They were also men who watered them with their prayers. Paul refers to their prayers as “our prayers” in verse 2. Evidently, prayer was something that they engaged in regularly as they labored and traveled together. Consider how prayer is defined for us in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It says that Prayer is “the offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.”

I think that we can conclude from this that Missionaries are, or they should be, men of great desire in their prayers. Their desire is to see the gospel come with power to people who have never heard of Christ before; people who they know will perish without hearing of Him. But the missionary is not only a man who desires the salvation of the lost; he is a man who greatly desires the growth and maturity of those whom he has seen come to know the Lord. He is committed just as much to this as he is to their conversion. Here in these verses we see the continuing commitment of these missionary men to the church in Thessalonica by means of their prayers.

They knew something about prayer which you and I need to know, and that is this. The prayers of God’s people for one another are part of the means that God uses to sustain the faith of all believers so that they will persevere in doing all that Christ has commanded them to do. Those who are leaders in Christ’s church must lead in prayer, in the way that the Apostle Paul describes here, so that their congregations will grow spiritually. It is very desirable that every believer might become a spiritual warrior in their prayers. That is, that they might often be thinking of, and interceding for, each member in the local church. And this, so those that they pray for might grow in their faith, and that they might bear fruit unto God. Prayer should be offered up by every Christian so that God will be glorified in them and the gospel will be spreading to many.

Those who teach and lead, should do this and set a good example. Paul says – “We give thanks to God always for you all...”, in verse 2. Thanksgiving to God shows God how happy we are, how satisfied we are, how much we approve of His work in our lives and in the lives of others. Thanksgiving in our prayers is that which brings glory to Him. It is that which pleases Him. Psalm 69: 30 – “I will praise the name of the Lord with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving.” “This shall please the Lord better than an ox or bull, which has horns and hooves.” “The humble shall see this and be glad; and you who seek God, your hearts shall live.”

You see, in making mention of what we are thankful for, in terms of what the Lord is to us, or has done for us, we are magnifying His name. We think of Him very highly, we honor and

esteem Him above all beings, as the Most High and the Most Excellent. His name we praise, His wisdom and power we trust, and we are thankful that He is so great and glorious and compassionate to sinners. The thankfulness of your heart, and the thanks which you give Him in words, these are worth more to the Lord than any sacrifice that you can offer, which you might think will please Him. Your thanksgiving and praise offered to Him are worth more than anything that you can think of to sacrificially do to pay him back. In Isaiah 30, verse 18, in the NAS, it says – “The Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you.” The greatest compassion and mercy that the Lord gives to us in this life is not found in His giving us material gifts and blessings, although he is great in bestowing those things.

The greatest of His blessings pertains to the grace and the gift of salvation which He gives to those who will trust in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And the overflow of that best of blessings is that He has given all believers in a local church to each other. The question is, do you thank God for those people? “We give thanks to God always for you all”, says Paul. Are you always thankful to God that he has made you a part of this local church and that He has given you the brothers and sisters in Christ that you do have? Do you tell God so, in your prayers?

You say to me – Well, as I think about them, the word “thankful” is not so much what comes to my mind. They are not exactly the people that I would have chosen to be placed with, you know. They do really have things about them that I really cannot figure out and which I cannot say I identify with. Well brother, or sister, I do not want to offend you, but God is the One who has chosen them, and He is the One who has chosen you, too. And so you see that He is the One who has deliberately placed you together in this spiritual body, of His local church. He expects you to be thankful for them because He knows that you can learn and grow from being around them.

That is, provided that they are humble, and that you are humble. God knows that they are in some ways, marvelously different from you. And God’s wonderful plan is not that everyone would be exactly like you in the local church. You should learn to give Him thanks always for all of His people, and He will prove to you why you should be so, in time to come.

2nd – A Missionary’s prayers and our prayers should include making mention of all those who they know, by name. (Verse 2b)

“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.” Now this is a very important component of your being able to see your prayers answered specifically. It is not just that you pray for your church, and your brothers and sisters in general. It is that you mention the people that you know, by name, in your prayers. I believe that this is what the verse is saying. It is very needful, that when you pray, that you move on from making the more general statements about the church, in your prayers, to your being more specific in lifting up individual people by name before the throne of God.

It is good and right, in other words, to mention families by name, and singles by name, and children by name, in your prayers. You can see an example of Paul’s consideration of individuals in a local church if you will turn with me over to Romans 16. In verses 3-16 he gives his greetings to the brethren there, and then he makes mention of no less than 23 individual people who he names, along with several households of people that he mentions as well. There is first, Priscilla and Aquila, who he calls, “his fellow workers who risked their own necks for his life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.” Do you think that Paul doesn’t pray for them always, giving thanks? No, I am very sure he does.

In verse 5 he calls Epaphroditus “the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ”. What a distinction. But it shows Paul’s consideration of God’s work in this person. Don’t you think that as he ponders what God has done for this man, and through him, that would be praying for him as well? I am quite sure that he did. Then in verse 6, he mentions, “Mary, who labored much for us”. Paul valued those labors of hers highly. He was thankful for her, he remembered the good things that

she was doing to help their missionary work in very practical ways. And I am sure that he prayed for her, all the more, because of the value that he placed upon her labors.

Then he mentions Andronicus and Junia, his countrymen and his fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me, he says. The list goes on and on. Paul thinks about his shared experiences with those whom he has mentioned, and I am sure that this led him on to prayer as he remembered what it was that they had shared, what they had given of themselves. He knew the value of these men who were apostles, and he also knew the value of those who were “nobodies” in the sight of the world; those who had been involved in laboring together in the gospel when he and Silvanus and Timothy came to them.

I believe that these greetings are an indication of what his prayer life was like. Prayer that makes mention of the individual names of people, requires that those people be specifically thought upon before the prayer is made. These people that Paul mentions are upon his heart and they were on his mind often. You could say that they were upon his heart continually. Each person, it is evident, was of real significance to him. They were not just a certain number that he thought of collectively. Rather, they were members of the body. They were important to him because he had come to know, and to see, and to believe that they were all significant in the makeup of Christ’s body, the local church in that place of Rome.

This is a Christ-like quality, when you pray like this; because our Lord Jesus does the same for each of us who believe, at all times from His place at the right hand of the Father. He has us engraved upon His holy heart, spiritually speaking. He ponders us in His holy mind. He intercedes before the Father and mentions our names in his the words of His heart, and the things that He expresses with His lips. Paul, when He prayed in this way, was more and more, becoming like his blessed Savior.

What about you? Will you not begin to pray in this way that mentions the specific names of God’s people, bringing them before the Father? Oh how your prayer life will begin to grow, as you begin to think of the people who are around you, in this church; when you begin to think about the details of what you remember, of their words, and their work comes to you mind. The Holy Spirit will help you in this. He will guide you into what you should be thinking of, in relation to them; what you should be praying about, in relation to each one. There is nothing wrong with your drawing up prayer lists of the people who are in our church here, and lists also of their relatives who need salvation, or the Lord’s help. This is certainly pleasing to God and profitable to Christ kingdom and His people.

Now 3rd – A Missionary’s prayers and our prayers should include remembering the spiritual work of other believers without ceasing. (Verse 3)

Verse 3 says,“remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.” There was, in the prayers of these missionary men, “a remembering without ceasing”. This “remembering”, in the presence of God, is a form of praying itself. “Pray without ceasing” it says in 1st Thessalonians 5: 17. I suppose it could be worded here, “remembering in prayer without ceasing....” And even the very specifics of what Paul and the others remembered unceasingly is given to us. “We remember without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.”

What a tremendous window is given to us here, to look into into the spiritual activity of the heart of a true Christian. These believers had faith, but they knew that they had to work at it to keep it strong by the grace which Christ supplied. Faith is something which needs to be in exercise in the Christian’s heart at all times, or it may grow weak and languish. We do have to work at faith. If you will turn with me over to 1st Timothy Chapter 6, you will see that this is true. Verse 11 says – “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.”

So, we see here that Timothy was told to flee the love of money and pursue after these spiritual realities which would bring God's rich blessings to him; blessings which would be conveyed by the Holy Spirit to his soul and spirit. And one of these was faith itself. Faith is something that must be pursued. You must run after faith or you will run after more money instead, and it will become a snare to you. Money is a resource, but faith is a greater and better resource. Verse 12 which follows, says, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." To fight the fight requires great exertion of your soul. It requires wrestling through many issues in life related to sin and righteousness in living our life. It will not do to procrastinate and lie down on the job as a Christian.

To maintain a strong faith takes hard work. To fight the good fight of faith requires stamina and strategy. And so, each of us must ask ourselves this question in every situation: Am I exercising faith, or am I exercising doubt and fear and skepticism? Whatever is not of faith is sin. (Romans 14: 23) I hope that you will understand that it does not glorify God in any way if you are lazy or neglectful of your faith. But by faith in Christ you can do all things. What a great encouragement it will be to you when you come to realize that someone else in this church is praying for your work of faith to continue and to be strong. The labor of love was also something which was remembered by Paul and the other missionary men in prayer. We find here, once again, that love is also something that is a labor, something which you must work at, something that you cannot assume that you or others in this church are always doing at all times.

You might be asked by some person – Do you love so-and-so who goes to this church? And you might answer, "Yes, I love them very much". But another question might follow on the heels of that question, and that is: How do you love them? What are you doing to show them the love of Christ? And you might be speechless. O, I hope that you will not be speechless before God in prayer, or in conversations with other believers about this subject. May it be that you can think of specific ways that you pray for and think about, and actually learn to do things for other Christians around you in this church, because you truly love them.

And finally, the patience of hope, or steadfastness of hope, that is mentioned here, is something that the missionary men remembered in prayer. They were thankful that they saw this grace in the believers at Thessalonica. But even though they remembered this hope of theirs without ceasing, in prayer, they still continued to make their appeal to God, that He would really sustain these young believers through all of their trials. They might be tempted to leave off following Christ because of persecution. But the missionary men knew and remembered the faithfulness of God was the basis of a Christian's hope. The strength of their faith, love, and hope was continually being monitored "in the sight of their God and Father".

Are you not thankful that our Lord is so trustworthy in giving you the grace that you need, to persevere in your faith, your love, and your hope? Ultimately, your faith will not fail, because of the prayer and intercession of Christ. But when we reach the end of our earthly race, and enter heaven, how much will we come to understand, that it was the prayers of faithful men and women around us, in our own church, which helped us to run the race with endurance. Let us see the connection between our prayers and the work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope which is seen in the believers around us. In eternity it will be shown how much this was the truth. Therefore, let us learn to engage ourselves now, that we might see the fruits of our prayers then, and rejoice.