

## *“Lord Teach Us To Pray”*

### **A Study in the Exposition of the Prayers of Paul: 1 Thessalonians 3<sup>1</sup> Two Week Study Guide**

#### **Week One**

##### **Scripture**

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

##### **Introduction**

By way of general contextual background: Paul and his associates planted a church in Thessalonica and shortly thereafter they were run out of town. And this not being enough, the unbelievers from Thessalonica then followed them to Berea and had them run out of there too. Paul was also restricted from being able to return to the believers in Thessalonica. Therefore, it is wholly reasonable that he and the others who cared for this young church would be gravely concerned that their labor was potentially in vain... that the tempter may have tempted the Thessalonians and that the work would be undermined and effectively destroyed.

If this was simply a church planting venture demonstrating the prowess and skill in this field Paul would have likely written the experience off as an unavoidable loss and not a blemish on his record as he was not given sufficient time to root this young church deeply for likely conflict. But such was not the heart of Paul's church planting ministry - it was not a professional venture with an expectation of possible losses along the way while maintaining a strong quota. This was a labor unto and for the glory of God - birthed from a magnificent affection and love for those whose eyes were opened to their need to be born again and who, having repented and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, were beloved family. This was as bitter and challenging as any war in which an enemy overruns the territory of one's home. These were, by virtue of common redemption in Christ, Paul's brothers and sisters in the Lord. Perhaps even more they were in a very tangible regard his children whom he only had a minimal time to nurture and care for before he was compelled to leave and entrust them to the Lord who keeps his own. The fear was that, whereas testing proves the faithful true, it will also cull out those with only a superficial and even artificial faith. It also imposes a context that might prove overwhelming to the unseasoned and young believers - creating grave disruptions, confusion, and doubt regarding that which they have only recently believed.

One can only imagine the anxiety that Paul and his associates were enduring. So, finally, when "he could bear it no longer" he sent Timothy to them so that he might know of their status - have they remained faithful... were they steadfast amidst the assaults of the enemy? The report back was a resounding yes and Paul's response was an abundant

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School  
ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

thanksgiving to God for them. Paul had done what he could to theologically prepare them,<sup>2</sup> but God kept them and to God was his thanksgiving applied.

"But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8

### **Paul's Prayer: A Product of Passion for People (2:17-3:8).**<sup>3</sup>

D.A. Carson provides three points by which the immediate context of the prayer can be framed before it is examined in greater detail.

1. Paul's prayer arises out of his intense longing to be with the Thessalonians.<sup>4</sup>
2. Paul's prayer arises out of passionate affection that seeks the good of others – not their praise, gratitude, acceptance, and still less some sense of professional self-fulfillment.<sup>5</sup>
3. Paul's prayer springs from unaffected delight at reports of the Thessalonians' faith, love, perseverance, and strength.<sup>6</sup>

### **Paul's prayer arises out of his intense longing to be with the Thessalonians.**<sup>7</sup>

"Here is a Christian so committed to the well-being of other Christians, especially new Christians, that he is simply burning up inside to be with them, to help them, to nurture them, to feed them, to stabilize, to establish an adequate foundation for them. Small wonder, then, that he devotes himself to praying for them when he finds he cannot visit them personally."<sup>8</sup>

Such is the nature of a life of fervent prayer – petitioning for others is not a chore, but an overflow of genuine affection for them and quickly one finds that rather than exclusively seeing prayer as *petition for action*, prayer itself is identified as *a preeminent act of service* and the greatest drive to more and direct service too. Not long will someone pray if they do not truly love the one they are petitioning to (the Lord) and for (others) and not long will someone pray for a request before they work to see it accomplished.

Immediately following the preceding quote Carson makes another observation that I think is uniquely valuable: "This is typical of Paul. He never descends to the level of the mere professional."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know." 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4

<sup>3</sup> A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Praying with Paul; D.A. Carson; Baker Academic, 2014; (Hereafter: Carson), Pg.60

<sup>4</sup> Carson, Pg.60

<sup>5</sup> Carson, Pg.61

<sup>6</sup> Carson, Pg.64

<sup>7</sup> Carson, Pg.60

<sup>8</sup> Carson, Pg.61

<sup>9</sup> Carson, Pg.61

The concept of “pastoral ministry” has become woefully professionalized and the subject merits significant attention, but for our purposes I want to draw out that as Carson was making plain, Paul is demonstrating a true pastoral heart: affections and anxieties included. Now, here is the concern: if we intentionally, out of a deficient understanding of the Scriptures, professionalize the pastorate, or if we unintentionally, out of a deficient application of the Scriptures, professionalize the pastorate, then we are at risk of expecting the pastors to pray out of professional duty and even more condemning... pray in the stead of others whose time is otherwise occupied.

**Personal Response:**

Does your affection and care for others demonstrate itself in your life of prayer? If it does – what does this look like? If it does not, should it? And how will you go about maturing in this area?

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Does your praying provoke action? Should it? Work to come to a conclusion on this and consider how your praying for others might impact your action for others.

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It is clear from the Scriptures that the pastors of the church are to commit themselves to prayer and the study of the Scriptures. Has this clear directive to them led to you succumbing to the fallacy that you should pray as opportunity affords and when you muster up the discipline and time to do it? Examine your present discipline in prayer – you have been in a precise study on the subject for no less than four weeks now. Are you committing to a faithful life of prayer or would the outside perception be that you are leaving that work for the “professionals.” Examine and then articulate your commitment – what still might need to change and what will you do to see that change through. Do not hesitate to secure the help of others here.

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**Paul's prayer arises out of passionate affection that seeks the good of others – not their praise, gratitude, acceptance, and still less some sense of professional self-fulfillment.<sup>10</sup>**

In this section I want to provide an extensive quote/citation from Carson because I think he speaks to a matter so very well and in a necessary way. It is primarily addressing “pastoral ministry” but not exclusively. However, I would encourage you not to dismiss at any time a discussion when pastoral ministry is a primary point of emphasis because as the leadership goes so goes the local church. Further, there are clear transferable principles for all believers that can be learned from instruction, exhortation, and admonishment to leadership.

“How pathetic. I know pagans who find satisfaction and fulfillment by teaching nuclear physics. In any Christian view of life, self-fulfillment must never be permitted to become the controlling issue. The issue is service, the service of real people. The question is, How can I be most useful?, not, How can I feel most useful? The goal is, How can I best glorify God by serving his people?, not, How can I feel most comfortable and appreciated while engaging in some form of Christian ministry? The assumption is, How shall the Christian service to which God calls me be enhanced by my daily death, by my principled commitment to take up my cross daily and die?, not, How shall the form of service I am considering enhance my career? This is not to deny that Christians may derive joy from work honestly offered to God, whether that work is vocational ministry or research into the properties of quarks. But it is one thing to find joy in the work to which we have been called, and another to make joy the goal of life, the fundamental criterion that controls our choices. It is one thing to weigh a Christian leader's evaluation of our gifts, and another so to focus on our perception of our gifts that self-worship has crept in through the back door. It is one thing to think of people as a live audience that will appreciate our displays of homiletical prowess, and another that passionately shapes each sermon to convey the truth to God's people for their good.”<sup>11</sup>

**Personal Response:**

Carson provokes the necessity for self-examination in several areas with the core of the examination needing to be: Has self-fulfillment become your goal in service (in the church, in your family, in your work, even in your commitment to prayer)? Do not rush to answer this, but commit time to thoughtful examination and prayer in answering it well. This is not an excuse to abandon service on account of improper motives, but an opportunity to submit service to God and not yourself (which may require a paring down in the process). Try to answer this in the form of a written prayer here.

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<sup>10</sup> Carson, Pg.61  
<sup>11</sup> Carson, Pgs.62-63

**Paul's prayer springs from unaffected delight at reports of the Thessalonians' faith, love, perseverance, and strength.<sup>12</sup>**

Carson contrasts a common deficiency of people with what Paul modeled and what should mark the mature in Christ.

A common deficiency:

"There are some people for whom the only interesting news is bad news."<sup>13</sup>

These are the persons who watch races (cars, bikes, etc.) only to see sensational accidents. They do not truly appreciate the sport or the level of excellence and commitment it took to compete on the level that they are watching, they have no care or concern for the persons involved or impacted by the incident, they only want to experience the sensational thrill of devastation. Now, to the shame of many (and I am speaking more to their immaturity than to some malice delight) – many persons only request prayer, give attention to prayer, or even know how to pray when the news is nothing short of tragic. Never attention to thanksgiving to God for his work in the lives of others and too infrequently following through on the "devastating or sad request" when God is pleased to show great mercy and deliverance.

An uncommon maturity:

"Every report of growth in real fundamentals – in faith and in love (v.6) – becomes an occasion for great rejoicing."<sup>14</sup>

By contrast to the immature and effectively unloving group that was previously treated, these are persons who through maturity and affection grieve over distressing/failed news and anticipate and rejoice in growth, progress, and the prevailing of mercy demonstrated in the lives of others.

Carson concludes this introduction to the prayer passage in a most helpful way – one that exhorts Christ honoring action. He states, "That means that if we are to improve our praying, we must strengthen our loving. As we grow in disciplined, self-sacrificing love, so we will grow in intercessory prayer. Superficially fervent prayers devoid of such love are finally phony, hollow, and shallow."<sup>15</sup>

**Personal Response:**

Paul's disposition was identified as "an uncommon maturity" – does this reflect your heart?

Do you genuinely seek to know how to pray for others or have times of petition primarily become the most efficient ways of getting inside information on the struggles of life and others?

Does your grief in hearing struggle carry over to your own struggling for others in prayer for their grief?

Do you long for times in rejoicing at another's progress and maturity in the faith? In short, what does your praying say to your maturity and love for others?

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<sup>12</sup> Carson, Pg.64

<sup>13</sup> Carson, Pg.64

<sup>14</sup> Carson, Pg.64

<sup>15</sup> Carson, Pg.65

Take time to examine and wrestle through this matter in prayer. Purpose to mature in areas of deficiency and determine that you will listen, grieve, rejoice, and pray in a manner pleasing to God and in service to others.

**Paul prays with rich thankfulness for the people of God.**<sup>16</sup>

"For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God," 1 Thessalonians 3:9

Paul's thanksgiving - his unrestricted gratitude to God is for the Thessalonians, not for what advantage he might derive from them, but for the work of God being realized in/through them. Further, the wealth of thanksgiving that he desires to express is made plain by its lack of qualification as observed through the question that he poses as though to say what would be sufficient in our giving thanks to God for you.

"For what thanks can we render to God for you...." 1 Thessalonians 3:9 NASB

"For how can we thank God enough for you...." 1 Thessalonians 3:9 NET Bible

Paul's joy was being rooted in God's graciousness to the Thessalonians which reflects primarily a love for God as he is the central element of the source, aim, and culmination of the expressed joy and the recipient of gratitude/thanksgiving.

Second to his joy in God was Paul's overflowing affection for the Thessalonians as they were the personal agents of this great work of God as it was being executed through them. Paul's joy was fueled by the Thessalonians delighting in God, faithfulness in their steadfastness, and in their expressing genuine love toward him and his companions.

"But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you...." 1 Thessalonians 3:6

**Context of Paul's Prayer:**

Thanksgiving: to God for the Thessalonians

Joy: before God because of the Thessalonians

**Additional Insights:**

Carson again demonstrates the public service, even ministry, that prayer often provides when it is expressed in person or secured in writing as it was here.

*"Although the thanksgiving is not addressed to the Thessalonians, but rather to God for the Thessalonians, nevertheless it is cast in such a way as to encourage them."*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Carson, Pg.65

<sup>17</sup> Carson, Pg.66 (Italics in original)

“He encourages Christians by thanking God for his grace in their lives. More precisely, he encourages Christians *by telling them* that he thanks God for his grace in their lives. Thus he has simultaneously drawn attention to the Thessalonians’ spiritual growth, thereby encouraging them, and insisted that God is the one to be thanked for it, thereby humbling them.”<sup>18</sup>

Note that Paul, while expressing his own joy, was expressing his own joy as it was in direct relationship or harmony with God’s own joy in such things: “This is joy ‘in the presence of our God’ – the kind of joy shared with God, based on the kind of event that makes God himself joyful. Paul’s values are so aligned with God’s that the things that bring joy to God bring joy to Paul.”<sup>19</sup>

**Personal Response:**

Are your prayers marked by thanksgiving and joy? If they are, for what are you expressing thanksgiving and joy? If not, then for what might you begin to more faithfully express thanksgiving and joy?

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How was Paul able to so express such thanksgiving and joy for the Thessalonians and what can you do to so pray for other believers in your own life?

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**Week Two**

**Paul prays that he might be able to strengthen these believers.**<sup>20</sup>

“as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?” 1 Thessalonians 3:10

Paul and his companions clearly made it a priority to consistently be praying for the Thessalonians. This priority was reflected in the earnestness of their praying (not casually petitioning, but a pleading like quality to it - rooted in his affection for them and knowledge of the threats that they face). Note that the expression of earnestness here describes: the idea of more, greater, abundant or having a greater emphasis.

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<sup>18</sup> Carson, Pgs.66-67 (Italics in original)  
<sup>19</sup> Carson, Pg.68  
<sup>20</sup> Carson, Pg.69

Paul's priority in prayer was reflected in the consistency of his pattern (night and day). This does not indicate that he was walking around in a meditative like state all the time or that he was exclusively praying for the Thessalonians (he had many burdens/affections of prayer for so many persons that he committed himself to in prayer), but praying for them was a consequential element of his day and therefore the pattern of his life in service.

Paul and his companions also had a longing to see these beloved brothers and sisters brought to full maturity in Christ. This priority was reflected in his desire for direct interaction with them (face to face). Letter writing and personal ambassadors/messengers was an invaluable element of Paul's and his companions' work, but it was not in place of their longing for personal ministry in the lives of the people - correspondence was no substitute for his desire for face to face fellowship and instruction and robustly committing them to prayer sustained this longing for personal investment.

This priority is reflected in his desire to see them fully disciplined (supplying what was lacking in their faith). Paul was not speaking to the Thessalonian believers' shame (this was not a rebuke to immaturity as we see in other places where the progress does not reflect the abundance of opportunity), rather he was wanting to see the aim of the work accomplished - believers complete and mature in Christ. No doubt this not only marked his correspondence, but how he prayed for them too.

#### Sidebar: The Valued Role of Eschatology in Paul's Discipleship Process

Note that Paul recognizes that the church of Thessalonica was sufficiently disciplined to be an autonomous church and one that was robust enough to withstand substantial assault by the enemy. However, they were an extremely young church and had not been provided the full breadth of proper discipleship as the Apostle and his companions were run out of town after only several weeks of being among them (this would include the time that the gospel was declared, believed, and the earliest elements of discipleship were provided). However, it is noteworthy that even in this limited time with these very new believers Paul placed a high priority on what we have codified under the theological discipline of Eschatology (the study of future and final things as revealed in the Scriptures). The hope and glory of the Lord's return, his calling up/snatching up (i.e. rapturing of his Church), and his millennial rule as the Son of David on the throne of David in the beloved city of Jerusalem - all such matters were not relegated to a later time of study and attention, but one of the earliest theological foundations established in this young church and elements that shaped his praying for them too.<sup>21</sup>

#### Context of Paul's Prayer:

Disciplined Consistency: in praying night and day

Personal Discipleship: in desiring to personally strengthen the Thessalonians in the faith

#### Additional Insights:

Carson states, "What is remarkable in this petition is not only the light it sheds on what Paul thinks is important and on his commitment to brothers and sisters in Christ, but also the way it mingles intercessory prayer and his own service."

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<sup>21</sup> This is not a theological tangent: examine the historical context of this young church plant and the intensive emphasis that the two letters to this church place on eschatology. Perhaps the problem is not on a disproportionate emphasis in these matters, but a lack of necessary and proper attention in the contemporary evangelical church.



Effectively Paul was modeling a petition in prayer along with biblically reasonable proposals for their being answered/resolved – recognizing that such proposal are at the mercy and good pleasure of God. It was petition armed with a readiness to act – prayer was neither dismissed as wishful thinking or improperly esteemed as a replacement for action. “For Paul, prayer is not a substitute for Christian service; it is part of it.”<sup>22</sup>

**Personal Response:**

Paul and his companions prayed both earnestly and consistently. How should this pattern of service to others impact your own?

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Paul longed to see the Thessalonians made mature in Christ and he sought to put feet to these vigorous prayers. What are you praying for others in view of the expressed will of God for the church and this world? Also, are you praying in lieu of action or in anticipation that it will better inform and strengthen your action?

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“Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you,”  
1 Thessalonians 3:11

Paul transitions from the discussion of prayer to the act of prayer and it was first for himself and his companions, but it was rooted in the full affection, concern, delight, and hopes expressed in the preceding verses (3:9-10) and ultimately was for the Lord's glory in their service to the Thessalonians. So, it was a worthwhile point of examination to consider how all that preceded informed his prayers and that how he prayed was with a view to that which was enduring, beyond himself, and with a view to the glory of God in service to others.

Paul was also making a hopeful petition that was both reasonable and consistent with the expressed will of God (speaking in general as the precise will of God is only made plain to varying degrees when the providence of God unfolds). He was not making some selfish or misguided petition. Neither was he declaring to the Thessalonians and God what he will do, but was submitting in hopeful prayer that the Lord might be pleased to provide the means for him to return to them in service: seeing them face to face and supplying what was lacking in their faith.

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<sup>22</sup> Carson, Pg.70

It is also helpful to recognize that Paul knew the route to access the Thessalonians, he knew what supplies and resources would be needed for travel, and he knew the potential dangers and perils - such were not the points of emphasis here. Rather, Paul was humbly submitting to the Lord that he might direct or guide his way to them. Paul recognizes that he was in need of God's kind help to accomplish God's desired purposes. Paul was less of a man on a mission than he was a man in submission, a submission demonstrated in his praying.

**Elements of Paul's Prayer:**

Personal Petition: praying for himself with a view to the glory of God in others.

Personal Petition: demonstrated consistency with the revealed will of God.

Personal Petition: was rooted in humble submission to the Lord.

**Additional Insights:**

Here Carson draws from the passage's larger context in which it was made plain that Paul and his companions were restricted from returning to Thessalonica to the present and he states, "These hindrances do not curtail his praying but incite him to greater fervency. They are not grounds for discouragement but for renewed intercession."<sup>23</sup>

I will further develop this thought by first gently admonishing the deficient view of prayer that is articulated when persons feel, or rightly conclude, that there is nothing within their means or power, but to pray. When you find yourself in the place of "all I/we can do is pray" then take to the work of prayer with greater vigor and find yourself mimicking Paul, "...we pray most earnestly night and day."<sup>24</sup>

Further, recognize that it is not that "those who cannot, pray," rather, it is also when you cannot you still have an amazing service to render by continuing to pray. It is as foolish to look down on the position of "only being able to pray" as it would be to look down on the soldier who has exhausted all personal means of coming to his company's aid and now only has the capacity to call in reinforcements or provide their coordinates for air support and rescue. That is not a deficient service, but an exceptional one of great consequence and blessing.

**Personal Response:**

Praying for oneself by no means has to be a selfish discipline. We petition God as ones who best know our own needs, weaknesses, desires, hopes, etc. However, we can also learn from Paul in how he prayed for himself in part to be useful for kingdom work beyond himself and for the benefit of others. How does Paul's example here impact, at least in part, how you pray for yourself?

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<sup>23</sup> Carson, Pg.71  
<sup>24</sup> 1 Thessalonians 3:10

Paul clearly prays in accordance with the expressed will of God and in trusting God. Do you discipline your prayers in this way? If not how might you improve here?

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Do you find yourself entertaining the fallacy that being in a position that your only contribution is prayer and this is a “lesser” or “deficient” service? How should you be thinking about prayer and traditional action/service? How will this impact your valuing and commitment in prayer?

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**Paul prays that there might be an overflow of love among these believers.**<sup>25</sup>

“and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,” 1 Thessalonians 3:12

Paul's petition transitions from one that benefits the Thessalonians to one that is directly for them: asking that the Lord would mature and strengthen them in the foundation of obedience, namely the exercise of love for others (which itself is enabled and informed by their love for God).

Note the generous language that Paul is using in his prayer for the Thessalonians. It is not simply filler language or nice poetry; rather it is an element of his aforementioned earnest praying for them. He was petitioning not only that they would love one another and others, but would increase and abound in such actions. Paul was essentially praying that their love for others would mimic the profound and inexplicably generous outpouring of God's love in Christ for the beloved.

John MacArthur provides a helpful insight on this matter: "With over 30 positive and negative 'one anothers' in the NT, love appears by far most frequently. It is the overarching term that includes all of the other 'one anothers.' Its focus is on believers in the church."<sup>26</sup>

**Three elements of applying love within the body of Christ as demonstrated here:**

Love one another "increase and abound in love for one another"

Love others "increase and abound in love for... all"

We love you "increase and abound in love... as we do for you"

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<sup>25</sup> Carson, Pg.71

<sup>26</sup> The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997, Pg.1846

Elements of Paul's Prayer:

Petition for the Thessalonians: praying for overflowing obedience in loving one another and others.

Petition for the Thessalonians: providing instruction (for the Thessalonians' conduct) and example (Paul and company's conduct - as stated in the prayer and as demonstrated by the very prayer itself).

Additional Insights:

Looking ahead to Paul's next letter to the Thessalonians (and a portion that we have already examined in this study) we see that this very petition was answered and he affirms its answer in their lives!

"We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing."  
2 Thessalonians 1:3

"This is a hard, brutal world. There are many protestations of affection, many forms of pseudo-love, whether in ancient Greco-Roman civilization or in our own. But Christian love, mature, deep, and unqualified, is a rare commodity. When it is displayed, it speaks volumes to a society that gorges itself in self-interest, lust, mutual admiration pacts, even while it knows very little of love."<sup>27</sup>

Personal Response:

Loving one another has become a consistent theme in our attention to the elements and disciplines of prayer as modeled by Paul. How does your praying reflect your theology and practice of loving the church and the members thereof?

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**Paul prays that these believers will be so strengthened in heart that they will be blameless and holy when the end comes.**<sup>28</sup>

"so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." 1 Thessalonians 3:13

Paul concludes the prayer with the affirmation as to why he was praying this way: *so that* (or for this very reason) the Lord may establish their hearts blameless in holiness before their God and Father. Now note that this goal or driving emphasis of the Thessalonians being fully prepared, complete, and in good standing before God was again with an eternal perspective that was definitively rooted in the time of Jesus' glorious return, "at the coming

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<sup>27</sup> Carson, Pg.72

<sup>28</sup> Carson, Pg.72

of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." This was not some abstract goal or nondescript timing; it was a goal of preparing them for that culminating moment in which their blessed hope was rooted - Jesus' return for his own.

The aforementioned petitions, the aforementioned "may" statements of hopeful desires rooted in and consistent with revealed truth were driving to this: the Thessalonians being blameless in holiness before God at Jesus' return.

3:10, "we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith"

3:11, "may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you"

3:12, "may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you"

The "mays" are giving way to "the day" - these petitions were for the immediate with a view to the future.

Paul understood the sure hope of the saints being glorified, even the necessity of it if they were to be in and enjoy the Lord's presence. He also recognized the progress and process of sanctification - being increasingly conformed to the image of the Son and that is both the work of the believer and the work of God. Finally, there is a culminating completion of this process when the believer beholds their Lord face to face... at the rapture of the church the natural body will be transformed to a supernatural form fit for eternity when the mortal puts on immortality and the petition of "may their hearts be blameless" becomes the reality of "'actual' hearts blameless" in holiness before our God and Father.

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." 1 Corinthians 15:20-25

#### Elements of Paul's Prayer:

Petition for the Thessalonians: for the completion of the Thessalonians' sanctification.

Petition for the Thessalonians: with a view to Jesus' glorious return.

#### Personal Response:

Paul prayed with precise goals in mind – are you praying with a view of precise goals in mind? Goals that are biblically informed and Christ exalting? In what way and how might you improve in this area of prayer?

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Paul prayed with a view to Christ's return and the readiness of the believers for that glorious moment – does the Lord's return properly consume your attention and hope in prayer? In what way and how might you improve in this area of prayer?

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Paul closes his letter, with the same emphasis that he climaxed this prayer in chapter three, with petition for their being fit for the Lord's return and a sure confidence in the Lord's accomplishing this very work.

*"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24*