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# Praying for Brotherly Love

## I Thessalonians 3:6-13

### Introduction

The last time I was in the pulpit I asserted that we often do not believe in prayer. We give evidence of this in what how and when we pray. We also indicated that one of the things we are trying to accomplish in this series is to develop a Biblical theology of prayer. We are working through many New Testament texts and expanding our understanding of what the apostles thought about prayer in how they prayed. An Old Testament series is planned as well and there is likely to be a concluding series that brings the Biblical data to a cohesive whole.

We desire to have the content of our praying shaped by the Bible. Our praying should not be so radically different from that which we read in the text, especially in the New Testament. If the petitions of our praying do not resembling what the New Testament prayers include in their petitions then perhaps we do not understand what prayer is about.

And we desire that our attitude in praying is sharpened by the Bible. When we truly understand what we are to be praying about and for then our intensity and consistency will be increased as well.

Those of us who find ourselves in the pulpit infrequently are also somewhat intimidated by the task. Not so much in following Russ or Dan, although that does play a part because of their proficiency and giftedness, but primarily in the task itself. Preaching is not a casual enterprise. It is not to be taken lightly. The preacher stands before his audience with the expectation and the compulsion to speak “for” God. Not in the sense of speaking in the place of God, but as his mouthpiece. The preacher is to take God’s words and make them accessible and understandable for the congregation. The task involves several issues.

One is that the sermon (the actual discourse that is delivered or “preached”) should be complete. It needs to express a complete thought. The text should be chosen to make a point that can be heard and then comprehended. Part of this is because the audience is “fluid” or changing. New people are frequently present, established people are often hindered or simply “irregular.” Even a series needs to be tied together and refreshed often.

The sermon also needs to have an element of comprehensiveness. In a very real sense, especially the way we approach the bible here at Clearcreek Chapel, the whole Bible comes to bear on how we are to understand any given passage. That often requires some “filling out” of the text for the audience.

But in doing so the sermon must also be clear. This is probably the most difficult task. Once the preacher has his “intellectual and spiritual arms” around the text, he must then make that understandable to his hearers. I often fail here, I may “get it” (or at least I think I do) but can I get you to “get it” as well?

That brings us to the last idea; the sermon must also be compelling. This is what sets a sermon apart from a mere lesson. It should grasp your imagination, it should penetrate your

heart, and it should affect your will and bring about some change in your thinking and behavior. It is not that we must “make” the Bible compelling, God’s word is active in itself, but we should be able to point out its challenge. The preacher should not so much put his voice in front of the Word but should be behind the word to point out God’s message.

Even though in our texts, Paul is speaking for God, he is also speaking and explaining God’s words for his immediate audience. He uses all he knows to be clear and compelling to make a complete and compelling point. Our text tonight in I Thessalonians 3:6-13 demonstrates Paul’s strategy in his prayer for the Thessalonians to grow in their brotherly love.

## Paul’s Relief (vs. 6-10)

This part of the letter concludes the rhetorical component known as the *narratio* (or the narrative). In this letter Paul is encouraging the Thessalonian believers to continue in the course of belief and behavior they find themselves in. The *narratio* serves to provide facts about the speaker, in our case the apostle Paul, especially in relationship to the hearers. Paul is still concerned about their commitment to the “faith” now even more so as they are and will be confronted with alternative views of the gospel. In this section from verses 6 through 10 Paul brings this section of the letter to a close indicating his great relief in the report brought by Timothy.

## Timothy returned (vs. 6,7)

*But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love as 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.*

Timothy has brought back a favorable and encouraging report about the status of the Thessalonians and their faith. I tend to agree with scholars (Charles Wanamaker NIGTC in particular) that place II Thessalonians chronologically prior to I Thessalonians. In this pattern, Timothy likely delivered II Thessalonians and gave personal instruction and encouragement. From the account in Acts 17 we know that Timothy and Silas (Silvanus in the epistles) stayed behind in Berea (Macedonia) and joined Paul in ministry again in Corinth. It is not contradicting to the text to have them meet him in Athens and then be sent back with further instructions – “Paul waited for them in Athens.” When Paul then proceeded on to Corinth they then joined him and continued in the Corinthian work.

Paul was greatly encouraged by Timothy’s report that they had not faltered in both belief and behavior. They maintained a commitment to the facts of the gospel and its expression in their love for one another.

## Thanks returned (vs. 8,9)

*For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God.*

Paul's response is one of joy and excitement. He can really live, that is he is given a renewed sense of strength and purpose. We often have this response as well in our work in ministry do we not? When complaint and difficulty are constantly our lot we lose heart and interest and energy. But when God blesses us with good news our joy leads to vigor and vitality.

And indeed Paul recognized God to be the source of this blessing both to him and to the Thessalonians. He asks "how can I return thanks for this wonder and joy? He asks because he likely knows he is unable to express the emotion he feels but he also recognizes that God is at work in the lives of the Thessalonians in their faithfulness and love.

### Encouragement returned (vs. 10)

*As we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?*

Paul would bring that thanksgiving in the context of his praying for the Thessalonians, in particular as he would express his desire to be able to return to personally encourage and instruct them further. Remember, Paul had been hastily removed from their presence and left them in a circumstance that most likely involved a fair amount of persecution from the remaining townspeople. Their response to his correspondence would in some measure be connected to how they felt about Paul and his integrity and if Paul demonstrated a sincere concern for their well-being. His expression of his desire to return would be important as he goes on to develop his exhortation in the letter.

Paul is deeply motivated to personally return with encouragement and instruction to bring to them the more complete conclusion to "their faith." He wants to ensure that their growth will not be inhibited because they need to understand more fully the role of the Messiah and his reign as cosmic king. No doubt conflict over the man from Galilee and Son of God could easily be used to confuse and confront this group of new believers.

### Paul's Response (vs. 11,12)

This brings us to our text proper tonight the prayer that Paul uses in transition between this unit of discourse and his more exhortative section which follows. Paul in this indicates the kind of praying he is engaged in when reminded of the Thessalonians and their concerns. Again, by looking closely at these prayers, our praying should be affected and changed to be similar to Paul's thinking. Paul's response to this good news of their continued stance in the faith is contained in this prayer.

### Prayer's direction (vs. 11a)

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus...

Let's pause briefly at this introductory phrase and recognize the direction of Paul's prayer. Paul addresses God as father and then links him to Jesus. First of all note that Paul addresses God the father. He is recognized as the orchestrator of human events. But he is not removed from us in some abstract way; he is indeed in a relationship that can be described as "fatherly." Paul calls him "our" God and father. There is a kinship relationship that goes beyond mere convention.

He then links this address to include "our Lord Jesus." The use of Lord with the name of Jesus is common to our "Christian" way of thinking, but to a Jew of the day the title of Lord in this context is only used of God. In this way Paul is emphasizing the divine character of this one whom he speaks at great lengths about.

It is interesting to note that even though Paul separates the two God the father and Jesus the Lord, he links them with a singular verb. It is not an unusual practice and is not a "proof" but is just one more area where distinction and unity are involved in trinitarian presentations.

### Paul's direction (vs. 11b)

*...direct our way to you...*

Paul's prayer has two specific petitions. His first is his wish to be directed back to them. Not so much in his need to have the desire to see them but to make the event available in his ministry work and opportunity. He desires that God smooth out the obstacles and hindrances that will prevent him from completing his perceived task.

This points out a significant issue, we may not know with complete confidence exactly what God has mapped out for us. We must use wisdom to evaluate what we have accomplished and make plans and strategies in connection to those plans. Then we pray that God will bring these plans to fruition in our lives. On the Xenia Christian campus is a high school ministry group that utilizes students to accomplish various "ministry projects." Their plans are made in this manner..."The team does not want to have a fixed agenda that would interfere with the Lord's leading. Each ministry outreach begins with a worship time that includes prayer, asking the Lord to lead us to the ministries He wants us to be involved in..." This is not the way Paul engaged his ministry opportunities.

### Thessalonian direction (vs. 12)

*...and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you.*

Paul also has a direction for the Thessalonians. Even though he now knows that their love continues to grow, that is still the focus of his prayer. This implies that we never reach the pinnacle of love for others. We cannot say "I have arrived in this area of love."

Paul first of all recognizes the Lord as the source of this love and the energy for its continued growth. "Lord" should cause us to think primarily of Jesus and that should cause us to

reflect on the gospel-centeredness of Paul's ethic. It is through the work of Jesus that we are energized for love and good works.

Note also Paul's use of the related words increase and abound. This should cause us to see the emphasis Paul is making of this concept. Not that love is the only or exclusive word that describes the Christian life, but can be a flag to include everything else involved. The behavior of a Christian will flow out of the belief of a Christian. Their commitment to loving one another would be a significant marker of their faith in a culture that highly esteemed class rank and status.

And the love he desires that they manifest is not limited to their own believing circle. It should first of all include all in that circle and not exclude any because of their class status. But it should extend to the community at large to allow them to see the change in their hearts available in the power of the gospel that they seem to reject.

### Paul's Reason (vs. 13)

*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.*

The "so" in this prayer can be leading us to a third independent petition or better the reason for Paul's wish for their love to grow.

### Established hearts (vs. 13a)

His coming to encourage them in their faith and love will establish their hearts. The idea behind "establish" involves providing structural support. It is the bringing of additional framing to give further strength to the item. From verse 2 of this chapter, that was one of the purposes of Timothy's visit to "establish" them in their faith. Here Paul connects our working and ministering to those around us with God's work in accomplishing this in their hearts.

Paul desires strong and reinforced hearts. He recognizes the attacks and fears that will face these young believers and wants them to have the ability to withstand the force of the gale that will undoubtedly be stronger than any physical hurricane whether named Dennis, Floyd, or Andrew.

### Holy hearts (vs. 13b)

But he sees this in relation to being "blameless in holiness." There is a character involved in this heart construction. It involves identifying with the character of God and allowing that to overshadow our nature. In other places Paul speaks more completely but here fixes our ideas of holiness as it stands in the presence of God, the judge, who again we are reminded is our father.

### Hopeful hearts (vs. 13c)

Our hearts though should be hopeful. The motivation is because the king of the universe will vindicate our actions when he returns. We should not allow our gaze to be fixed upon the complexities and complications of this life. Yes we need to address them and walk through them. They are not illusory or a matter of perception. Our concerns are real and planned. But they are intended to bring about change, to increase our confidence and faith in the one who causes them to be and to increase our love and dependence upon one another. The gospel not only answers the problem of the past but it gives us strength and purpose for the future!

## Conclusion

Paul in this section has shown us how to be complete in his references to the gospel. He has been somewhat comprehensive to give allusion to the gospel work of Jesus and the sovereignty of God over the circumstances of our lives. Paul has been clear in his thanks to God for their love for each other and continues to compel them forward for even more growth in their pursuance of God's character in their lives.

So then, how should this effect our praying? Paul was very much concerned that God continue to work in the hearts and lives of this young group of believers so that they would remain faithful in the face of persecution and affliction, indeed in the face of false teaching regarding the program of God's redemption.

We should acknowledge that we are engaging the supreme king of the universe whom we are related to as father and child.

We should recognize the centrality of the gospel and the Lordship of Christ in each prayer.

We should pray for opportunities.

We should pray that our hearts will abound in love for each other (especially those less like us).

We should pray that the glory of the name of Christ be seen by those around us who are not believers by the way our love is evident even to them.

We should pray that our hope be firmly fixed on the ultimate victory of the gospel, not upon our current circumstances.

We should pray:

Father, May \_\_\_\_\_ and I increase and abound in love for each other and for all so that our hearts may be grounded in holiness before You at Your coming with all Your saints.



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I Thessalonians 3:6-13

Pastor Dale Evans • The Chapel Pulpit • <June 26, 2005> Sunday Evening

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Requests for tapes or questions about this message may  
be directed to the church office at (937) 885-2143 or e-mail.  
Pastor Dale uses the *English Standard Version* in his preaching and teaching.

### Introduction

### Paul's Relief (vs. 6-10)

### Paul's Response (vs. 11,12)

### Paul's Reason (vs. 13)

### Conclusion

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### Personal Reflection and Application

- How does my understanding of this text affect my worship and my walk?