May the peace and joy of Christ dwell in your hearts and lives

Philippians 3:20 “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*”

As we become more like Jesus in our Christian walk here on earth, our frustration grows with the evil and rebellion we see. Evil no longer hides in the shadows; it is blatant and openly challenges goodness.

How comforting it is to us that while we currently live here, our true home is in heaven; in the Kingdom of God. That kingdom is where we have our citizenship. God’s Kingdom is where our heart and soul reside. Although we do good for this world, our work is ultimately to build up our heavenly home, and please our merciful King.

What a relief for us that the cares of this world need not weigh heavy on our hearts.

*Lord, who may reside in Your tent?
Who may settle on Your holy hill?
One who walks with integrity, practices righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart.
He does not slander with his tongue,
Nor do evil to his neighbor,
Nor bring shame on his friend;
A despicable person is despised in his eyes,
But he honors those who fear the Lord;
He takes an oath to his own detriment, and does not change;
He does not lend his money at interest,
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.
One who does these things will never be shaken.*

 Psalm 15

In Christ’s love

John

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

As we read Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, it is apparent how much he loves and cares for this church; this body of Christ. The first chapter was an introduction that applauded their efforts and encouraged them in their faithful and true walk with God in Jesus. Paul didn’t have to write to the Thessalonians to straighten them out because they had strayed from the truth. They were holding tightly to the Gospel.

In spite of this, as always, satan followed Paul to try to destroy the work he had done. This is what will always happen. Just as with Paul, when we do any work for Christ, satan will do his best to sabotage it. We must learn to expect this and be ready to deal with it. We deal with his attacks by holding fast to Jesus, standing on His word, and prayer.

Revelation 12:11

*And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.*

Satan is too strong for us; he is defeated by the work of Jesus on the cross: by the blood of the lamb. We can only overcome satan through Jesus; by making Him our Saviour and being willing to testify that Jesus is the Christ. The Bible, which is the word of God, is the sword of the Spirit. Scripture is our weapon against temptation. It clears the way for us when facing the obstacles that satan places before us. Prayer is our lifeline to God. It is how we remain a branch attached to the vine; receiving spiritual nourishment through fellowship with the Almighty.

Paul behaved himself in the proper way when he was among the Thessalonians. Because of that, he was able to have them call to mind how he acted as his defense. Apparently, people had begun saying bad things about Paul after he had left. When reading this letter, we might start to think that the whole city of Thessalonica had been converted. Far from it. It would have been the same as it is everywhere else; most people would not have chosen the narrow path.

According to Acts 17, Paul spent three Sabbaths preaching in the synagogue. He then spent a short but unknown length of time in the house of Jason establishing the church. The local Jews roused a mob of ruffians and started a riot. The brethren of the new church sent Paul and Silas away during the night. So, Paul had to leave quickly and under cover of darkness.

Those in the city who were against Paul and those who always followed him trying to discredit him and lead people away from the true Gospel began making accusations against him. From this letter it seems they accused him of leaving when the going got rough and therefore he didn’t care about the church. They apparently accused him of preaching only to gain money or power; and that he used clever speech to trick them into supporting him.

How powerful it is that Paul is able to call upon the Thessalonians themselves to be witnesses to his character. During the time he lived with them, he had never done anything deserving the claims that were made against him. In accordance with Biblical law that required two or three witnesses, Paul also called God as a witness. This would have been taken much more seriously then, than it would now. It was strongly engrained in the people that falsifying an oath to a god would bring about serious consequences.

In reading Paul’s defense against these character attacks, we see how important it is for a pastor to do his best to live a proper life. His motives for being in the ministry must be good. His behavior at home and in public must be the same as it is in church. His position must not be used simply to gain power. Paul said he was approved by God, which means that he has passed a test from God, to be trusted with the Gospel. Consequently, he worked to please God and not men. He told them the truth, in love; but he didn’t tickle their ears. This is what a pastor is still called to do.

Don’t breathe a sigh of relief yet. Remember from the first chapter how Paul complemented the Thessalonians for imitating him. It is the same today: all Christians are called to lead an exemplary life. While I beg you not to imitate me; imitate Paul and imitate our Lord Jesus Christ. All the world watches Christians. We will be accused of wrong doing or bad intentions. Make sure the accusations are false. The media loves it when a pastor falls; the local scoffers love it when a Christian falls. We are called to reflect the light of Jesus in this world: in love, in caring, in suffering without complaint even when it is unjust suffering.

One important thing Paul points out is that God examines the heart; the way it is worded means a continual examination. This is why Paul is so careful to be God-centered; so careful to please God rather than men. It is possible to fool people, it is not possible to fool God. So many have fallen into the trap of speaking to please people because it elevates their ministry, wins them prestige, or makes them money. There seem to be no consequences. But God is not mocked, they will face Him, and they face certain destruction.

Don’t make that mistake. Be genuine in your Christian life. If you fool people for your entire life, it will do you no good in the end. Do your good works to the glory of God. Because we are fallen mankind, it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to do a good work without some selfish motivation. God understands that; just be sure to let God know in prayer that you know your sin nature tarnishes your works. Thank Him for the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the faith given by the Holy Spirit, that makes those good works acceptable and pleasing to Him.

The first two verses in chapter two say a lot on behalf of Paul and Silas’ character and belief in their mission. They had both been severely beaten in Philippi, spent most of the night with their feet held in stocks, and then walked 100 miles to Thessalonica. Surely, they were still stiff and sore when they arrived. Yet they immediately went to work sharing the Gospel while engaging in strenuous labor in order to support themselves. They were willing to continue to preach in Thessalonica in the face of much opposition. In other words, they were willing to possibly suffer the same fate again; all for the sake of God and the people they spoke to.

Again, the church imitated what they saw in Paul. They saw the evidence of what Paul had suffered and then they saw him continue in preaching, willing to undergo the suffering again. As we have seen in this letter, the Thessalonian church was a persecuted church. Yet, because of what they had seen in the men who brought them the Gospel message, they were willing to accept persecution; even with joy.

In some of Paul’s letters, he seems to be harsh. It is easy to get the impression that he is all business. But we know from 1 Corinthians 13, which is referred to as the “love chapter”, how important love is to Paul and Christianity. In this letter to the Thessalonian church, we get to see the tenderness and love that Paul really has in his heart. This is again something imitated by the Thessalonians and needs to be lived by us.

In verse 8, Paul says, “*in the same way we had a fond affection for you and were well-pleased (or delighted) to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives*”. Certainly, Paul and Silas were delighted to see the Holy Spirit working in power such that the people were responding to the Gospel. But more than that, they were drawn to sharing their lives with the people.

The word translated “well-pleased” or “delighted” means more than just happy; although it does mean that. It indicates that by an act of will, by a decision, Paul chose to share his life with them in a special way or commitment. Paul chose the most tender image imaginable to express how he cared for them: a mother caring for her own infant child. This shows the depth of how deeply he allowed himself to become attached to the people in the church.

Even more, in addition to the idea of motherly care, he treated them in a fatherly way also. This would have also been done in love and tenderness. He taught them and encouraged them and implored them to live Christian lives. He would have taught them all the vices to avoid that he mentions in his other letters. He would have earnestly spoken to them about the idols they worshiped, and reasoned with them about the one true God. He would have prayed for their salvation.

Can we do any less for each other and for our loved ones? Isn’t it worth a few bucks to buy them a Bible and encourage them to at least read one of the Gospels? Isn’t it worth it to spend some time talking to them about Jesus? Inviting them to church? Can we give up a little time to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ? Speak a word of encouragement?

Everything I’ve just mentioned involves sacrifice; But that is exactly the kind of life a Christian is called to. We may not have to suffer like Paul; he was specially called to spread the Gospel and suffer terribly for the sake of Christ. We are called to give up time and money and convenience for the sake of Christ’s Kingdom.

Verse 12 sums up the reason for all that Paul is doing, “*so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory*.” Salvation is the first step. If a person is not saved, nothing else they do is worth anything. With salvation comes the ability to please God. Remembering that God sacrificed His only begotten Son; remembering all that Jesus endured for us; the only reasonable thing for us to do is “*present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*.” That’s Romans 12:1.

In other words, walk in a manner worthy of God. First, we must recognize that this is impossible for us; we are too sinful. But this is no excuse for us to avoid trying. When we are saved, we are covered with the righteousness of Christ; when God looks at us, He sees Jesus. Next, because of the Holy Spirit, we are able to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God.

Paul taught the Thessalonians how to live out the commands of Jesus. We have the Bible and it teaches us these things. To live in a manner that is worthy of an infinitely holy God is a tall order, but that must be our aim.

We are also obligated to God because He called us in the first place. From 1 Thessalonians 5:24, “*Faithful is He who calls you*”. Not everyone accepts the call, but those who do are brought into God’s Kingdom and His glory.

Keep in mind that God’s Kingdom is not a geographical location, but it is the rule of God. It is where His will is faithfully and willingly obeyed. So, this kingdom that we have been called into exists now. In Mark 1:15 Jesus proclaims, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*” We are subjects in this kingdom now on earth and we willingly obey our King.

Also, the kingdom is still to come in its fullness and glory in the future. We are told in 2 Thessalonians 1:5, *This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you indeed are suffering*. Notice the future tense “*will be*”. We know that Christ’s Kingdom will come in the future when Jesus comes back to establish His reign.

It is a wonderful comforting thought to know that we Christians are in God’s Kingdom now and in the future, we will be in God’s absolute Kingdom in which we will participate in His glory. All evil will be done away with. It is a somber thought that any who remain outside the kingdom on this earth, will remain outside for eternity.

Part of living in a manner worthy of God is to work to expand His kingdom. We expand the kingdom by bringing in souls through sharing the Gospel, supporting others who share the Gospel, and prayer on behalf of the lost. Time is short; we need to be about our Master’s work.

Prayer

Almighty and ever living God, we see in the life of Your servant Paul, an example of selfless love given for Your glory and for the good of those who would be Your people. Guide us, Holy spirit, to imitate his example. Keep us focused on following the commands of our Saviour, Jesus; to love God and build His kingdom, and to love others as ourselves.

Help us to use Paul’s example in attaining our ultimate goal of becoming like our Saviour Jesus. While Paul was a good example, Jesus is perfect. We ask for that sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to bring our hearts and lives in line with that of Christ. May the perfect commands of Jesus be our rule of life.

We bless You and thank You Lord God, knowing that one day, we will be truly sanctified and made perfect as we worship in Your presence. We are grateful for citizenship in Your kingdom now, but look forward to the coming of Your unquestioned rule here on earth. Until that time, keep us in Your perfect will.

Thank You Yahweh, in the name of Jesus

Amen