The LORD be with you

With all that we see going on in this country and in the world, it is very easy to become angry. We are tired of the injustice and the lies; of those who push evil onto everyone and into every situation. It is natural for us to react in anger.

Anger is a human response and in itself isn’t a sin. However, we must be very careful with anger because it can quickly become a sin. While there is such a thing as “righteous anger”, it is very difficult to achieve. Often, we feel justified in our anger; but if we give it close biblical scrutiny, we will find that it is anger in opposition to God’s will.

The Bible is clear that our battle on earth is not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil. (Eph 6:12) Our hatred should be directed toward sin, because God hates sin. (Deut 12:31, Pv 6:16-19) Our anger toward those who oppose God: satan and his demons.

When we see people committing evil acts, and they not only get away with it but prosper, we Christians are called to pray for them. (Matt 5:44) We pray for them because it is according to God’s will, He doesn’t want them to perish. (2 Pet 3:9)

In the end, God will deal with those who do not turn to Christ. They are not for us to deal with except in prayer. When you feel anger, remember their fate, and pray for them.

*“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord*.

 Romans 12:19

In Christ’s love

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 10-11-20

1 Thessalonians 1

In Paul’s letters to the church at Thessalonica, we see a young church that is firmly grounded in the Gospel. He isn’t writing so much to correct problems as to clarify some points and to counteract false teachings that are trying to infiltrate the church. As we read through these letters, it is easy to see how much Paul loves and cares for this church.

The account of Paul evangelizing Thessalonica is found in Acts 16 and 17; this was part of Paul’s second missionary journey. He and his band were in what is now known as the nation of Turkey. They made a couple of attempts to broaden their evangelization in this area but were stopped by the Holy Spirit. Finally, Paul had a vision to go into the province of Macedonia. The group quickly crossed the Aegean Sea and went to the city of Philippi.

It was here that they made their first convert in this province; a woman named Lydia. She opened her home to them as a base of operation and as the fledgling church in Philippi. This is where Paul was followed around by a young girl who was possessed by a spirit of divination which mocked them. In frustration, Paul rebuked the demon in Jesus’ name and it left her. Unfortunately, the men who owned her had been making money from her and now their income was gone.

They stirred the town up against Paul and Silas which got them beaten and put in a prison. This actually worked out for the best. During the night, they were miraculously released; and this led to the salvation of the jailer and all his family. Regardless, they still had to leave the city.

They ended up in Thessalonica where they reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue for three weeks. They made quite a few converts of both Jews and gentiles. As usual, the unconverted Jews became jealous and stirred up crowds so that Paul and Silas had to leave the city. But the church had been established. It had taken deep root in the Gospel and growth belongs to Jesus. He will build His church and none of the attacks of satan will defeat it.

The missionaries ended up in Corinth. Paul was worried about the new church in Thessalonica and eventually sent Timothy back to see how they were doing. The report back from Timothy was very encouraging, so Paul wrote to them from Corinth to encourage them to continue as they had been and to even accel.

Paul begins his letter listing himself and his two companions. If your Bible has the name “Silvanus”, this is the same as “Silas”; it’s just the Latin form of his name. Paul is certainly the principle architect of the letter; the others would be named since they were known to the Thessalonians from their first visit.

The letter is addressed to the church. The word that is translated “church” simply means “an assembly”. It is a gathering of people. It was very commonly used for different gatherings such as civic meetings of the community or any other group of people who gathered together. Notice that in the New Testament, the word church never indicates a building; that is a fairly recent use for the word. We have to be careful when we use the word to make it clear if we mean a building or a group of God’s people.

When Paul addresses his letter to the church, he is making it clear that he wants it to be shared with all the Christians in the city. His letter is not just for a few leaders. By this time there were probably several groups meeting in different houses and Paul wanted this letter shared with all.

Because this word “church” could mean any number of groups of people, Paul designates which group he means specifically. It is the one which is “*in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*”. He is writing to the Christian church in Thessalonica.

That statement contains an important word: in; “*in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*”. Both Jesus and Paul make use of the idea of being in Christ. This isn’t a physical or geographical location; this is a deep manner of existence. Being in Christ is to obtain what we need from Him; it means to live a life that is ruled and directed by Him. It is a beautiful and close relationship with our God and Saviour.

Jesus expressed it as the relationship between the vine and the branches. He is the vine and we are the branches. As long as the branch is attached to the vine, it can draw nourishment, it can thrive, it can bear fruit. If the branch is removed from the vine, it withers and dies. Likewise, we must stay vitally attached to Jesus. He is our true source of life; our spiritual and eternal life.

Paul uses the example of the body. Christ is the head and we the church are the body. If a body does not stay attached to the head, the body will perish. Both individual Christians and churches will perish if they do not remain attached to Christ; do not remain under the head. He is the source of our spiritual nourishment which we need in order to become more like Him and to bear fruit for God.

Usually, Paul will say we must be in Christ; but here he says we need to be in both the Father and Jesus. In verse 10, Paul makes reference to Jesus being God’s Son. In these two statements, we see that the New Testament teaches that God the Father and Jesus the Son are One God. Jesus is God, He has always existed, and always been with the Father. This is one of the primary doctrines of Christianity: The Father and Son are co-equal and co-eternal. We are also aware that the Holy Spirit is a person of the God-head; He too, is co-equal and co-eternal, but we find that in other sections of the Bible.

This is a fundamental doctrine of Christian teaching: We believe in one God; He exists as three different personalities: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. None of these have been created, they have all existed from eternity past and will exist for eternity future. This is not something that we can readily comprehend, but it is what the word of God teaches.

I bring this up and stress it because there are more and more church groups that deny the Trinity in one way or another. They may say that the Son was created or that He wasn’t really God. They may say that the Son is God but that Jesus was just a man. They may say that there is one God, but that He will become the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit depending on what He wants to do. These heresies have been around since the first century and have been soundly defeated by careful study of the Scriptures. They have risen again in our time; don’t be fooled.

Paul gave them a greeting which is really a prayer: *Grace to you and peace*. Grace is, of course, undeserved favor. It is because of grace that we can be saved. We do not deserve salvation; the Bible tells us that when Jesus died for us, we were actually enemies of God.

[Romans 5:10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%205%3A10&version=NASB)

*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

So, praise God that He was willing to make a way for our salvation even though we didn’t deserve it. But Paul now prays for the Christians at Thessalonica to have grace; that God will give them grace. Here is the generosity of God. He has already given His Son as a sacrifice so that we can have salvation we don’t deserve; yet He is willing to give us more favor so that we can do those things that are pleasing to Him and good for us. Paul’s prayer is that the church would have more grace from God, so that they may produce more fruit. In this, Paul is praying in God’s will: God wants us to bear fruit through His power.

This is a good prayer for us. Ask for God’s grace to be continuously poured out on others and on the church. This is praying according to God’s will. It is only through God’s power, given to us by grace, that we can bear spiritual fruit. God wants us to bear fruit for Him and His kingdom. It is good to ask Him for help in this.

Paul also prays for their peace. Peace can be directed to many different levels. The most important is having peace with God. For we as human-beings, to have peace with God is not our natural state. As was mentioned in the passage from Romans, we were enemies of God. Ephesians 2:3 tells us that we are by nature children of wrath. In other words, because of our sin nature, we will hate God and we are subject to His eternal wrath. This is why it is so important to have peace between ourselves and God; and that peace can only be obtained through Jesus Christ.

It is good for us to pray for peace; this is also according to God’s will. But we need to be aware of what we are praying for and consider how to pray in each case. Normally, because we are people and we are often focused on ourselves, we pray for peace in our lives. This is fine, but we must pray with understanding. Jesus tells us in John 16:33, “*In the world you have tribulation*”. Then He tells us, “*but take courage; I have overcome the world*.” So, we can pray for a peaceful life and we can pray for relief from any difficulties that we are experiencing; but we must then be willing to except God’s answer and praise Him for it. We will have a peaceful existence when Jesus establishes His kingdom.

We often pray for world peace and an end to war. This is also fine, but again, understand what we are asking for. Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:6, “*You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars*.” Wars will not cease in this age. We can pray for the end of specific wars or the avoidance of a conflict, and the Lord may intervene to stop it. But ultimately, to pray for the end of war is to pray for Jesus to come back and establish His kingdom here on earth; which we are told to pray for.

As Paul is doing here, it is pleasing to God when we intercede for others and ask that peace be granted them. We must pray for non-believers. Pray that they would receive Christ so that they may have peace with God. If someone doesn’t have peace with God, any other peace is worthless. For believers we can intercede, asking that they would have relief from difficulties in their lives. But then, we also accept what God decides. This is where Christian fellowship comes in. We spend time with those who are experiencing hard times and simply share in what they are going through.

There is a peace that we can have regardless of our circumstances. It is a peace that we can ask for ourselves and also ask for on behalf of others. We learn about it in Philippians 4:7: *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. We receive this peace when we take all our problems to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s not that our problem stops, but we are given a peace and calmness deep within that carries us through the difficulty. It is truly a miracle. We may hurt or grieve, but our souls are at peace because we know that God has us in His loving hands, and ultimately, we are safe.

How generous and wonderful is our God. He sacrificed His only begotten Son to bring us salvation that we didn’t deserve. And although that is more than we could possibly hope for, He wants to give us more. Again, through Jesus, He gives us the ability to obey His commands and His commands are a joy to us. We are able to do the works that God wants us to do and this too is a joy to us. He gives us an inner peace and contentment in spite of circumstances, because by faith, we know we are safe and loved by our Creator.

Prayer

You are almighty God and we praise You and worship You. As Your servant David asked, “*What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?*” And yet You do take thought of us and You do take care of us. The reason is simply that You love us. It is not by our merit or because we are loveable; it is just because You love us.

Thank You Lord God for that love, for that care. You give us grace and peace. You are for us and You have plans to prosper us; may that grace and peace settle deep within our spirits. Thank You for that Holy Spirit given faith, that we can understand and experience these things; that we can know that You have all things under Your control; that Your plan will come to pass.

We pray now for this Your church, that You would guide us according to Your will. We intercede for the area of Capon Bridge. Rebuke the evil that is resident here, pour out Your Holy Spirit to turn hearts to Jesus, send workers into the field to bring the harvest into Your barn.

We pray these things in the blessed name of our Saviour Jesus

Amen