

## A Blessing Indeed!

### 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Online Sermon:

[http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

The Day of the Lord draws near, are you prepared to meet Him? As His faithful followers, we need not dread His return, for we walk in His light and know our destination. Yet, the contemplation of being judged for our deeds, both righteous



and otherwise, weighs heavily on our hearts! Having been sealed by the Holy Spirit and having received every blessing in Jesus Christ our Lord, we simply do not have any excuse for not loving Him, the members of

our church, and even our enemies. Surely those who are a masterpiece of God's grace are willing to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, by inviting Him to transform and renew our minds daily? While we may falter against the relentless temptations of Satan, luring us towards the

broad path of sin, surrender is not the answer. Instead, let us follow the example of Apostle Paul, fervently praying for the Lord's strength to fortify our hearts, enabling us to stand blameless in His presence. As the Lord prepares a place for us, eagerly anticipating His return, will we be found steadfast in faith when He and His angels come?

This was Paul's prayer for the church of Thessalonica. Paul prayed that God would clear the way for him to visit the church that God the Father and Jesus His Son would strengthen their hearts so that they would be found blameless upon His return. Let's dive into Paul's prayer as found in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.

## Clearing the Way

Paul prayed that our God and Father and our Lord Jesus might clear the way for us to come to you (verse 10). Paul's realization in his earnest prayers that the Satanic block hindering his return to Thessalonica could only be overcome with divine intervention underscores the depth of his spiritual struggle and the recognition of the opposing forces at play. This insight reflects Paul's profound reliance on the power of God to break through spiritual barriers, highlighting the centrality of faith and prayer in navigating adversities.<sup>1</sup> "The Lord of the angelic hosts

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1-2 Thessalonians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 237.

can break the satanic blockade whenever it pleases Him to do so.”<sup>2</sup> What is also remarkable about Paul’s request is not just the absolute faith Paul has in God but also his view on the Lord Jesus Christ. Born into the Jewish faith and deeply ingrained in the steadfast traditions of monotheism, epitomized by the



revered declaration of the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4,<sup>3</sup> it is indeed striking to encounter the transformation of Saul, later known as Paul, the self-proclaimed "descendent from

Pharisees" (Acts 23:6) and a zealous persecutor of Christ's followers. In one remarkable sentence, he professes a belief in the divine nature not only of God the Father but also of His Son, Jesus Christ. This profound shift reflects the magnitude of Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, an event that fundamentally altered his understanding of Christ's identity. With the Lord's words, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4), firmly entrenched in his soul Paul

wrote to the church of Corinth, "yet there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:6).<sup>4</sup> So, to the Father and the Son Paul makes his appeal for them to remove Satan's blockade so that he might return to his family whom he dearly loved! Thankfully Paul's prayer was answered but only in God's time, five years later, was he permitted to return to Thessalonica!<sup>5</sup>

Like Apostle Paul we are dependent on God to open and yes even sometimes close doors of ministry.<sup>6</sup> This recognition underscores our acknowledgment of divine guidance and sovereignty over the paths we tread in serving others and spreading the message of faith. Just as Paul encountered both opportunities and obstacles in his missionary endeavors, we too navigate a journey where God's hand orchestrates the unfolding of events. Trusting in God's wisdom, we lean on Him for discernment and direction, knowing that He alone holds the keys to unlocking new opportunities for ministry and discerning when it is time to redirect our efforts elsewhere. "We are not architects of our kingdom; we are ambassadors for His kingdom. Kicking in doors that God is unwilling to open will only lead to

<sup>2</sup> Gary Steven Shogren, [1 & 2 Thessalonians](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 143.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, [The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 130.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee, [The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 130.

<sup>5</sup> John R. W. Stott, [The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 67.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 69.

disaster.”<sup>7</sup> As we contemplate the allure of embarking on a new public ministry, especially one that promises success and potential spiritual renown within our community, it becomes imperative to discern whether it aligns with God's will. Amidst



the temptation of spiritual notoriety, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to seeking God's guidance and ensuring that our endeavors are rooted in His purpose. Furthermore, as we

embark on any new ministry, we must be prepared to engage in the good works that reflect the character and teachings of Christ. These actions should not serve to elevate ourselves but rather to glorify God the Father in heaven (Mathew 5:16), acknowledging Him as the source of all blessings and achievements. In doing so, we guard against the pitfalls of vanity and self-aggrandizement, instead channeling our efforts towards advancing God's kingdom and manifesting His love and grace in the world.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 70.

<sup>8</sup> Gary Steven Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 143.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1-2 Thessalonians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 238-239.

## May Your Love Increase

Though they were already “renowned for their love” (1:3)<sup>8</sup> Paul prayed, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you” (verse 12). “Love is the glue needed to bind together converts from differing social and economic strata”<sup>9</sup> and is also the means in which one can be identified as a disciple of the Lord (John 13:35)!<sup>10</sup> When someone experiences spiritual rebirth, they undergo a profound transformation where the guidance they receive transcends the worldly pursuits of politics and self-gratification. Instead, their instruction comes directly from the Father, fostering within them a genuine love for God and for their fellow beings (John 4:9-10).<sup>11</sup> Charles Swindoll suggests four ways a believer is to express their love: “listen to others who hold viewpoints which you disagree, demonstrate grace by looking past people’s faults to see their strengths, recognize the value and dignity of other human beings, regardless of their ethnicity, socioeconomic class or background, and by showing God’s love by selflessly serving and sacrificing for others.”<sup>12</sup> While nurturing an unwavering love for God and the church is a formidable task, the capacity to extend love even to those who persecute you for righteousness’ sake stems solely from the

<sup>10</sup> Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 70.

<sup>11</sup> Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 177.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 70.

boundless love of the Good Shepherd. Such love, which surpasses human limitations, only emanates from He who is pure



LOVE one another, As i have LOVED you.  
John 13:34

love.<sup>13</sup> Yet, can one truly claim their love overflows if they cannot embrace the differences of a fellow brother or sister? And can one genuinely declare to have learned love from God if they

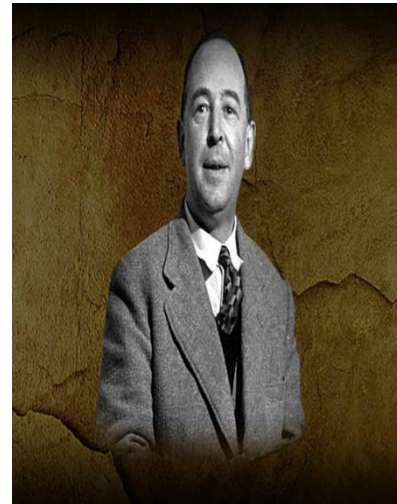
harbor hatred towards their enemies, who are also created in His image (1 John 4:20-21)? After all, if you only love those who love you, what reward will you get (Matthew 5:46)?

There are people in this world that are incredibly hateful towards others, especially Christians! God is not asking us to love them by our own weakness which would be an exercise in futility! He is not asking us to have a “romantic love or a buddy love or a family love or an emotional love”<sup>14</sup> for those who abuse us but instead commands us to demonstrate His agape love which transcends all understanding and has no limits or exceptions. While this is not easy task to accomplish, we must

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 239.

not forget we have been divinely enabled to express this kind of love to everyone we meet. In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote the following plan to share agape love.

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less....



The difference between a Christian and worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or “likings” and the Christian has only “charity.” The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he “likes” them; the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.<sup>15</sup>

The difference between a Christian and worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or “likings” and the Christian has only “charity.” The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he “likes” them; the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 143.

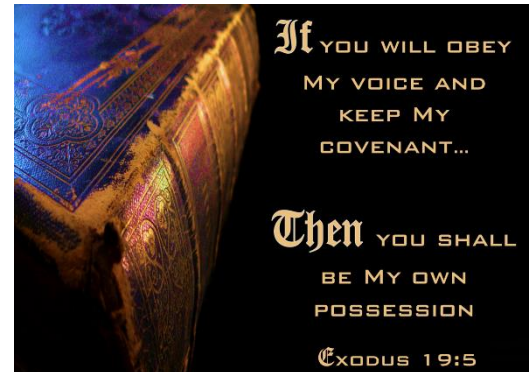
<sup>15</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 144.

While it remains undeniable that without love, our acts of kindness echo emptily like a 'resounding gong or a clanging cymbal' (1 Corinthians 13:1), there are moments when taking the initiative in kindness is crucial, allowing the Spirit of God to subsequently refine and shape our indifference and animosity towards our adversaries into an overflow of love. This transformative love stems from the realization that the comfort and love we have received are meant to be extended to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). Nothing is beyond the realm of possibility for God, not even the remarkable act of inspiring His own followers to extend comfort and love to the most heinous and hateful individuals in this world.

## May you be Blameless

Paul finished his prayer with the following request, “may He (the Lord) strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones” (verse 13). While Paul’s stated goal in sending Timothy was to “strengthen and

encourage the Thessalonians in their faith” (3:2),<sup>16</sup> Paul knew the only way they could remain blameless in the face of persecution was with the help of the Lord!<sup>17</sup> While “the adjective



‘blameless’ was used in the Greco-Roman world to describe people of exceptional merit or extraordinary civic consciousness,”<sup>18</sup> in the Bible this term was used in describing a

kingdom of priests and holy nation (Exodus 19:6)<sup>19</sup> that sought and obeyed the will of God in their lives.<sup>20</sup> Paul’s prayer was that the Lord would strengthen the Thessalonians so that they would be “blameless in regard to their outward, visible conduct toward each other and the world; and in “holiness” with regard to their relationship with God and Christ.”<sup>21</sup> Their love for God and one another was to increase, overflow and with the aid of

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 240.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 240.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 240.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 241.

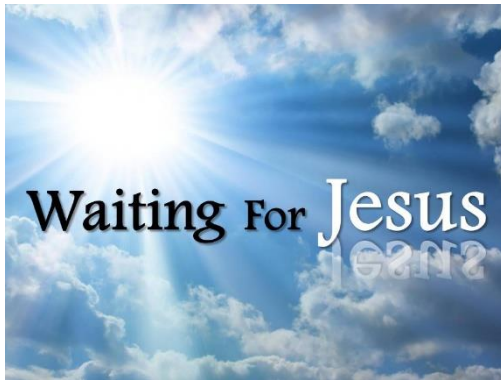
<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 241.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon D. Fee, [The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 133.

the Holy Spirit<sup>22</sup> they were to continually invite Him to plant furrows of righteousness in their hearts so that they might be ready for the Parousia.<sup>23</sup> Matthew 16:27 states, “for the Son of Man is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels” and what a glorious day that will be!

## Conclusion

Are you living your life worthy of the Gospel message and are you ready to meet your Lord, Savior, and King? In preparation for the Lord’s return and the gathering of the elect,



Mark 13:27 reminds us of the universal scope of God’s redemptive plan. Just as the winds encompass all directions, God’s grace extends to people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. This inclusive

vision challenges us to break down barriers of division and prejudice, embracing our shared identity as members of God’s beloved community. One of the signposts of being a Christian is to not just love God and other members of the church, but also

our enemies because at the foot of the cross all are sinners in need of redemption and atonement. As believers, our response to the imminent return of Christ should be marked by both confidence and humility. Living in the hope of Christ’s return compels us to align our lives more closely with His kingdom values, actively participating in God’s work of reconciliation and renewal. May we indeed be counted among the faithful when the Son of Man comes in His glory, ready to usher in the fullness of God’s kingdom. While we eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of God’s promises, we also recognize our ongoing need for grace and transformation. Therefore, we echo the sentiment expressed in Revelation 22:20: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

---

<sup>22</sup> F. F. Bruce, [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#), vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 75.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon D. Fee, [The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 133.