

Pray for Us

2 Thessalonians 3:1

Paul has been spending almost two chapters stabilizing and establishing the Thessalonians, doing damage control caused by a false letter with bad doctrine. The Thessalonians had made remarkable headway in spiritually maturing, however, they were still young in the faith and were easily knocked off track when they were given some doctrine that differed from Paul's teachings. We now come to the last chapter in 2 Thessalonians and Paul is finishing up with some admonitions that are focused on practical day-to-day living. This is very typical of Paul's writings, giving doctrine first followed by practical applications. If your doctrine is not correct, then your actions will not be pleasing to God.

In his 13 books, written to the Church, the Body of Christ, Paul prays or mentions prayer at least 40 times. Prayer was an important part of his life. Most of Paul's prayers concern spiritual growth of members of the churches he was writing to. Others were prayers of praise and glory for how the Lord was working. We also see Paul requesting prayer for himself and the furtherance of his ministry to the Gentiles.

Prayer for spiritual growth

Paul was very concerned about the spiritual growth and maturity of believers. The longest he stayed in any one place was probably at Ephesus by staying there for about three years on his third missionary journey. Other places he visited were as short as 2—3 months. This didn't give him a lot of time to teach the Mystery and set up pastors to take over the ministry.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was that they may have a deeper knowledge of God and enlightenment to understand the hope they have in the richness of their glorious inheritance (Ephesians 1:17—23). He also wanted them to come to know God's great love so that they would be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:15—21). Paul desired that the Philippians abound in their love with knowledge and discernment (Philippians 1:9—11). Notice that this love Paul has in view is not about feeling some emotion. Rather, it is based on a true and deep knowledge of God. While so many are looking for a special experience or feeling, Paul makes it clear that close fellowship with God is based on what we know of Him from His Word. Paul also told the Philippians to bring all their anxieties to the Lord in prayer (Philippians 4:6). To the Colossians, Paul desired that they be filled with the knowledge of God's will, and by doing so, to walk in a worthy manner, bearing good fruit (Colossians 1:9—11). They were to pray with watchful expectation (Colossians 4:2—4).

Prayer for salvation

Although Paul's ministry was primarily focused on believers becoming mature in the faith, he also was concerned for unbelievers, especially for his fellow Israelites (Romans 10:1). Although many today believe that God has predetermined who will be saved, this verse indicates otherwise. Why pray for someone to be saved when they believe that decision has already been decreed by God before creation? This prayer indicates that anyone within Israel could be saved if they desired to do so.

Prayer of thanksgiving

Paul often thanked the Lord for the believer's faithfulness. He thanked the Lord for the church at Rome for their strong faith that was heralded throughout the world (Romans 1:8). He thanked the Philippians for partnering with him in the gospel (Philippians 1:3—6). He thanked the Lord for the Colossians for holding firmly onto their future hope that bolstered their faith of God and love for the saints (Colossians 1:3—5). He thanked the Lord for the Ephesians and Thessalonians for their faith, hope and love (Ephesians 1:15—19; 1 Thessalonians 1:2—3).

Paul's personal requests

When Paul made personal prayer requests, they were often about the advancement of his ministry. He asked that they pray for him to be bold in preaching the gospel (Ephesians 6:19—20), be delivered from unbelievers (Roman 15:31; 2 Thessalonians 3:2—5) or have opportunities to preach the gospel (Colossians 4:3—4). He also asked for and valued their general prayers by asking them to keep him in mind when they prayed (1 Thessalonians 5:25).

Paul's examples of praying

Throughout his writings, Paul mentions that he prays often and that it is something that all Christians should do. According to Romans 1:8—10, Paul constantly remembers them in prayer. The members of the church at Rome were always on his mind, even though he never meet them. He prayed for the Colossians and Ephesians often (Colossians 1:3, 9; Ephesians 1:16). He also prayed night and day for the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

Prayer instructions

Paul does give some general advice concerning how we should pray. For instance, in Philippians 4:6 Paul tells us to bring every request to the Lord. In Colossians 4:2 they are instructed to devote themselves to prayer while watching for God to work and being thankful for how He answers their prayers. This goes hand-in-hand with Ephesians 6:18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17, to pray without ceasing. We are also not to hesitate to go to the Lord in prayer (Romans 12:12). He also understood that we don't always know how we should pray, but the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us (Romans 8:26). He understood that prayer connects Christians with God in a special way and therefore saw it as being very important aspect of a believer's life (Romans 15:30).

Paul's personal prayers

Scripture gives only one prayer that focused specifically on the Apostle Paul, that of him praying that the Lord remove the "thorn on the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). This "thorn" is not made know to us, but it was given to Paul by God to keep him humble after his trip into heaven. Paul asked for God to remove it three times and each request was denied. Notice that God did answer Paul, just not the way Paul wanted God to answer.

Prayer rightly divided

It's important to understand how we should pray in the dispensation of Grace. Most people go back to the Gospels as their guide, usually picking out a verse such as Matthew 21:22 (... whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.). Those who live by this verse become disenchanted with Scripture because they find it really doesn't "work." By examining how Paul prayed, what he prayed, it's obvious that we will not receive everything we ask. This is why Paul's prayer for the thorn to be removed was not answered in the affirmative. Why should we expect all of our prayers to be answered the way we want when Paul even had his prayer denied? It wasn't about Paul's lack of faith, but about a change in God's dealing with mankind.

God's promise to us is that we will have peace (Philippians 4:6). When we pray, we are to drop our worries and concerns upon Him and trust that He will deal with our concerns in love, doing what is best for us. Prayer is God's way of changing us, not our way of changing God. This is why most of Paul's prayers were focused on spiritual maturity so we can know and serve Him properly.

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