

A Few Final Words

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[0 : 00] 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, the last four verses.! We're reminded again that what we've been studying here is actually a very personal letter between Paul and the Thessalonian congregation.

However, personal correspondence does not necessarily equate to private correspondence, and we know that to be the case in these New Testament letters. Paul's letters bear the marks of intimacy between friends, between a spiritual family, even with a shortened time that he had with this church.

He sees them, and this letter, again, it bears the marks of closeness and intimacy and love. And yet, his writings, including 1 Thessalonians, were meant to be publicly read, copied, and then distributed to other congregations.

We even see that intention stated somewhat in verse 27. The letter circulation is evident in that we still have it today.

And here again, in 2025, in a place very far from Thessalonica, we are reading Paul's letter publicly before the brothers and sisters in Christ, seeking to understand God's will for us and to be transformed by the working of his word.

[1 : 55] And I actually think this is quite amazing for us to think about, just the means by which God has given us his word. The means by which he inspired and preserved his word for us is, it's amazing, it's kind of beautiful.

God gave us so much of the New Testament in this form, in this letter form. Through the ordinary means of discipling Christians, helping one another faithfully follow Jesus as we await Christ's return.

That's how God gives us his word. That's how he preserves his word for us. That's the picture here. Even as we come to just a simple salutation at the end of the letter, we're just reminded, how has God given us his word?

Well, much of it in the New Testament has just come through the faithfulness of discipling relationships. Paul and his team seeking to help the Thessalonian Christians be faithful followers of Christ.

And he writes his letter and God inspires the writing and preserves the writing so that today, we can take it and disciple one another. Christ's command to make disciples is baked into the very format in which 1 Thessalonians was written.

[3 : 24] The letter, as you've seen, it follows the typical apostillary structure of the first century. It opens with the names of the authors and the recipients. It follows that up with an offer of thanksgiving for the church.

All of that's common in the letters that we see from the New Testament and other letters from that time. The primary content, it comes through the main body of the text.

And then a few final words of personal greeting, instruction, and blessing bring it to a close. Nothing really unusual about that as far as the structure is concerned. But it's in these few final words that we find our place today. If you're like me, when you get to places like this in your reading, you may be tempted to kind of rush through them, right?

To my shame, to be honest with you, I spoke to Julie earlier in the week. We were talking about this text. And I told her, I'm thinking about just moving on to something different in preparation for Easter.

[4 : 32] And as you might imagine, the Lord rebuked me for that in my spirit. Why? Not all scripture is equally impactful.

But it is all inspired by God and profitable. If all God intended to use to accomplish his work in us was the most impactful text, then that's all he would have given us.

But that's not what he has done. Not every meal you eat in your life will impact you in the same way. In fact, most of them you'll never even remember.

And yet each one of them sustained you. Each one of them nourished you. Each one of them shaped you. In some cases, literally. Well, it's the same with God's word.

Yeah, it's a simple greeting at the end. But it's an inspired greeting. Yeah, it's basic instruction. But it's instruction from God. To my shame, I wanted to skip it.

[5 : 43] God has something to say to us here. And we need to hear him. You've heard sermons that consist of three points in a poem. Here in the final words of 1 Thessalonians, we have three instructions and a blessing.

They're simple. They're straightforward. But I think what you will find is that they are so very necessary for us as well. Let me give you the three instructions and then we'll wrap it up with the blessing, okay?

Instruction number one, pray for gospel ministers. Pray for gospel ministers. Verse 25 is straightforward, isn't it?

It's only four words. Brothers, pray for us. Pray for us. Now, we can take time to think and meditate generally on the necessity of prayer.

After all, if we're going to call ourselves Christians, it means we're going to follow in the footsteps of our Lord. And if we're going to follow in the footsteps of our Lord, we will pray as he prayed. We will pray as he taught.

[6 : 49] We will pray as he modeled. We will pray as he commanded. All of that's true. But here, Paul has a particular application of prayer in mind.

Two pieces of it, I think, are useful. First, he was focused, I think, on corporate prayer in this case. In fact, all three of the instructions, as we come to them in this text, Paul is thinking about what Christians do together, not merely what Christians are to do in private.

And we understand that somewhat in his repeated use of this term, brothers. Brothers. It's used 17 times in this letter.

That's a lot for a little letter like 1 Thessalonians. 17 times he uses brothers. In Greek, the difference between brothers and sisters is really just the ending of the word. But whenever it was being used to speak generally like we would say siblings, it was always in the masculine form.

And as we work through 1 Thessalonians and we're looking at each instance of brothers, what we come to understand contextually is that Paul is not highlighting a group in the church. He's not addressing only the men.

[8 : 06] He's addressing the entire congregation. We might read it, and some of your Bibles might actually interpret it this way or translate it this way. Brothers and sisters, pray for us.

He's addressing the whole congregation. And his instructions seem aimed at what they do together. And what is it that we do together most fundamentally? We worship. And I think we see that coming through in the three instructions, including this one.

So that's part of the focus. He's not thinking of only private prayer, though we need to care about that. But here, he's especially concerned with what we're doing in prayer when we are together. But then there's a second focus. He was also focused on instructing a particular subject for their corporate prayer.

Notice what he says. Pray for us. Pray for us. Pray for me, Timothy, our companions.

[9 : 08] His expectation and request was that they continue in prayer for him and his team as they did gospel work.

Hence the instruction, as I've put it in the heading. Pray for gospel ministers. The specific application, I think, here is that we pray together for those serving in gospel ministry.

Perhaps especially doing so and intentionally doing so in the regular worship gatherings of the church. Notice that the instruction, it isn't to pray for gospel ministry in general.

Though we should certainly do that. We want to pray for the gospel's advancement in general across the globe. But that's not what he's aimed at here. He says pray for people.

Pray for us. Those who are doing the gospel ministry. Pray for missionaries like Val and Angela.

[10 : 11] Pray for missionaries like the Howard family whom you'll meet in just a few weeks. Pray for pastors. And by the way, pray for one another.

Pray for prayer. Because aren't we all to be doing this gospel work? But what exactly are we meant to be praying for these people?

Paul doesn't elaborate on that here, does he? And there could be a few reasons for that. Certainly the Thessalonians were familiar enough with his circumstances that he didn't need to say anything more.

They've just finished a really fruitful visit from Timothy, who I'm sure was open with them about all these things. And Paul doesn't feel the need to elaborate any further than what he does.

But Paul actually routinely asked for churches to pray for him. And if we just take a quick look at some of the occasions that he does that in the New Testament, I think it will help us better understand how we should be praying for one another and praying for those who are serving in gospel ministry in other ways around the world.

[11:14] There are many. I want to show you three, maybe four. First one, just flip over a page. It's the 2 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verses 1 and 2.

Notice what Paul says here. Finally, brothers, pray for us. Pray what for us? That the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you, that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men.

Three things stick out here to me. What is he asking them to pray for? We are to pray that the word of God will do its work. That the word of God will do its work through these people who are ministering the word to others in evangelism and in further discipling.

Pray that the word does its work. As you pray for Val and Angela and others, pray that God's word would go forth, that it would speed ahead through their ministry. We're to pray that what God has done in us, he'll do in others.

Isn't that what he says? As has happened in you. Well, what had happened in 1 Thessalonians? We know what happened. The Holy Spirit came and empowered the gospel preaching of Paul and his team so that they, despite significant persecution, were not only converted, but persevered and continued longingly in faithfulness to the Lord.

[12:43] And he says, Thessalonians, pray that God will do that same thing in other places. What else? Oh, pray that God will deliver gospel ministers from adversaries.

Not for their own sake, but for the sake of the gospel. I think that's the implication there. So what should we pray for? Pray that the word will do its work through God's people, through his instruments.

Pray that what's happened in your life will happen in others through this work of the gospel. Pray that God will overcome the adversaries for the sake of his gospel.

Would you turn to Ephesians 6? Maybe just a few pages to the left. Ephesians 6. And look with me at verses 18 to 20.

Chris is in a series with us right now on the armor of God. That's what's coming just before this. I'm picking up just on the tail end of that. Paul says, pray at all times in the Spirit.

[13:50] This is verse 18. Pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication to that end. Keep alert with all perseverance. Making supplication.

That's just another term for prayer. For all the saints. And then notice, and he says, and also for me. But he gives a specific thing for them to pray about for him. Pray for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.

What do we gain from this? What should we be praying for ministers of the gospel? Well, one, we should pray that God will give gospel ministers exactly what to say. Oh, isn't that the hard thing to do in our evangelism sometimes?

It's just know what to say and how to appropriately glorify and accurately give the gospel of God to other people based on their unique circumstances and their unique questions.

Isn't that hard to do? In their preaching. Lord, give me the words to say. Would you pray for me? Pray for me, Paul says, that God would give me exactly what I need to say in any given moment.

[15:03] Whether that be in the synagogue on a Saturday in any given city or whether it's in the Arapagus in Athens among all the philosophers and leading philosophers of the day.

Pray that God will give me what to say. And then notice the second thing. Pray that God will give me boldness to say it. Boldness to say it. That's what we should pray.

Turn now to 2 Corinthians chapter 1. 2 Corinthians chapter 1. Just one verse here. I think is a helpful note on the goal of our prayer.

2 Corinthians 1. Verse 11. You also must help us by prayer so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through those prayers.

That's interesting, isn't it? Paul doesn't say, look, you know, I'm getting beat up everywhere I go. Will you just pray that it'll hurt a little bit less? No, he says, will you pray a lot?

[16:33] And will you recruit others to pray for us so that when we see God's work accomplished through us, we can then turn around with you and glorify him that we may give thanks thanks because he is the one who has done this work and he's used your prayers to do it?

That's amazing. Can I just show you one more? You're close enough to it. Romans chapter 15. Romans chapter 15.

And there are many more. You can search them out on your own. Romans chapter 15. Verses 30 to 32.

Paul says, I appeal to you brothers by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit. That's an authoritative charge. That's what's happening there. To strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.

So again, he's asking for them to pray for him. But then again, he gives them a specific thing to pray for. That I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. We've seen him ask for that already.

[17:54] This one's unique. That my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints. You know, Paul wasn't the most popular figure among Christians in Jerusalem.

What's he asking? Lord, would you just pray that God would spare me from the unbelievers that want to kill me? And would you pray that God would so work in the hearts of the saints to which I endeavor to minister that my service to them will be acceptable.

That they'll understand my love. And then notice what he says in verse 32. And then pray that by God's will I can come to you.

That I can come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. Now he gets to them but he gets to them via a four year prison sentence. But what's he asking them to do?

Pray for more opportunity. How are we to pray for gospel ministers? All of these ways that gives us a pretty good place to start doesn't it? Paul utterly depended on God for all things.

[19:07] He knew that prayer is one of God's ordained means for accomplishing his divine work. So he constantly asked the churches to pray for him. Not for prosperity and health in and of himself but for his faithfulness and the work of the gospel through him.

An American pastor once asked Charles Spurgeon about the secret of his great influence in London and throughout Europe. you've probably heard this story before.

After a brief pause Spurgeon says simply my people pray for me. There was a designated place in the church that he referred to as the boiler room.

It's where people would gather and they would do nothing but pray. They'd pray for him. They'd pray for the elders of his church. They'd pray for the gospel ministry work.

We trust God to do his sovereign work according to his good pleasure. Prayer is not in opposition to that.

[20:19] But what prayer does is it acknowledges that prayer is actually a means by which God determines to do that work. God not only ordains the ends he ordains the means.

And so he says come pray ask me commune with me and I think we must give ourselves to this. I think the instruction here for us church is that we must especially give ourselves to doing this for those we know who are laboring in the gospel. We should do it in Sunday morning gatherings.

We should do it when we gather for our Christ from beginning to end study this summer for our first principles class this summer when we're getting together over coffee we should be readily prepared to pray for those who are ministering the gospel.

Brothers pray for me. Brothers pray for those you know in this community and around the world who are laboring in gospel ministry. Pray for one another all of these things as we endeavor to obey the great commission.

[21:33] That's instruction number one. The other two will be a little bit quicker. Instruction number two greet all the brothers with a holy kiss he says.

What's the instruction? I think it's this express Christian affection. expression. Express Christian affection.

Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. Now let's be honest that's weird. It's not only weird because kissing's weird certainly not sanitary it's weird because it actually seems a bit trivial here doesn't it? Why would Paul be concerned about instructing Christians on how to greet one another? But this is not an unusual command in the scripture actually it's repeated quite often.

Paul issued it in at least three other places to varying churches. So did Peter. The exact command Peter makes one change rather than a holy kiss he says the kiss of love.

[22 : 53] When Paul met with the Ephesian elders for the final time in Acts 20 it says that they fell on him that they embraced him that they kissed him.

When Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son as the prodigal is still a great distance off the father sees him and what does the father do? Jesus uses this language he says the father ran to him and embraced him and kissed him.

So what seems a trivial thing to us had an obvious meaning and purpose to these early Christians. I don't want to overtax what Paul instructed here but I don't think we can quickly dismiss this either.

So let's meditate on it for a moment. Culturally speaking the kiss was used to demonstrate familial affection or to symbolize peace between two parties.

Now I don't think Paul's purpose in this case was to institute a kiss as the standard and universal greeting for Christians. I think that would be too rigid of an interpretation but I don't think that what Paul is instructing here is merely politeness.

[24 : 15] He's not just simply saying make sure that you give a good nod or smile or handshake or say hello whenever you see another Christian. I think it's more than that.

I don't think that it's just politeness. I think that would be too loose of an interpretation. The command is about intentionally and genuinely expressing familial family affection to one another in the church.

It's a call to outwardly demonstrate toward fellow believers the heart level affection that you possess inwardly for them. It's working something from the inside to the out in a physical expression.

It is a call not only to love each other but to express that love in the way that we interact on an ongoing basis. But why?

Why give this command? Well in doing so not only do we edify one another once we're able to move past perhaps the potential awkwardness of the act.

[25 : 29] We edify one another but what else do we do? We demonstrate something here. We demonstrate our gospel union to the watching world.

A people who most often in a church setting have no other commonality with one another expressing a kind of affection that is typically only seen in blood relatives.

I think that's what's meant here. I think that's what's at the heart of what Paul is saying here. He's not concerned for us to kiss as we greet.

I don't think that's the primary concern here. I don't need Josh laying a wet one on me after service today. But he isn't just speaking about an inward disposition either.

I think we need to understand this as a physical yet appropriate action that expresses real affection for brothers and sisters in Christ.

[26 : 34] And can we just acknowledge that's not an easy thing to do. I'm not real touchy feely just kind of by nature. I fell in this often to just brother I love you.

Sister I'm praying for you. We need to remember what's at the heart of this instruction.

It's not about the act. There's something under the surface here. How do you love the ones who drive you crazy? Ask my wife.

Let alone express that love. After all to do it disingenuously would mean that it's not a holy act. let us not forget that Jesus' very betrayal came at the sign of a kiss. The showing of affection without the possession of affection.

[27 : 44] So we need to think about this. How do we actually love and express that love for people that we actually struggle quite a lot with feeling affection for?

And the answer is in the gospel. Isn't it? Christ and Christ alone is our bond.

Our fellowship, our affection with one another in this church is based on nothing else. It should be based on nothing else than Christ and Christ alone.

Our unity with one another is based entirely on our union with Christ. We see that in 1 John 1. We see it in Ephesians 2. We see it in John 13.

Over and over and over, the affection that we are to hold and the affection that we are to express is not feigned. It's not manufactured. It is a genuine affection that does not come from any commonality save the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 51] Our spiritual union with Him, a divine miracle that takes place at the moment that Christ saves you, that union is what unites you with everyone else who is also in union with Him.

That's what's at the heart of this. It's the gospel. But as long as we attempt to center our relationships on any other potential commonality, whether it be our race, or whether it be our family situations, whether or not you have a kid or you don't have a kid, whether or not you're married or unmarried, whether or not you're in the older generation or the younger generation, whether or not you live in this place or that place, whether you eat this food or that food, whether you do this job or that job, if it's trying to base it on anything else, anything other than Christ, you will never fully possess and express the kind of love that is behind this command.

It can be on nothing else and it is on nothing else. Our affection for one another is rooted in Christ's affection for us.

Your affection for me and my affection for you and your affection for every other Christian is rooted in the fact of Christ's affection for that person.

And how was his affection displayed? Romans 5a. But God demonstrated his love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[30 : 35] That's his affection. That's the extent of his affection. And it is as a result of his affection for that person that drives you crazy or perhaps has significantly hurt you.

That you actually not only have the power but the command to love them. You are to love that Christian that drives you crazy because Jesus loved him enough to bear God's wrath in his place. I had a conversation with Julie one time. This just tells you how messed up I am. We were talking about something like this and I said, how could Jesus love a person like that?

And you know how God works. You know what I am about to say almost immediately. It is like God says, how could anybody love you like that? That is what this love is.

It is not about anything else than that. It is about the gospel. Why does Paul use brothers 17 times in a short letter that even in your double columned Bibles takes up two and a half pages?

[31 : 56] 17 times. Why? Because in Christ we truly are a family with an eternal bond that cannot be broken.

We can sense estrangement but it will not be broken because Christ will lose none who belongs to him. And we need to endeavor to express that blood-bought affection in our interactions with one another.

Instruction number three. We need to recognize the authority of the scriptures. We need to recognize the authority of the scriptures. Look at verse 27.

I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. Simple. Yeah. Important. Very.

Now many have suggested perhaps you've had this thought before that the apostles were unaware that what they were writing was the inspired word of God. Passages like this prove otherwise.

[33 : 06] It may not have occurred to Paul at any given moment that this letter would eventually be added to a collection of apostolic writings and then bound in a codex in the first and second century and developed through time and passed on 2,000 years later in the form that we have it today.

That may not have occurred to him. Who would ever think of that? Right? But that's not the point. He clearly understood what he was writing to bear the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Peter himself in 2 Peter 3 literally calls Paul's writings scripture and puts them equal to the Old Testament scriptures. So this was not a secret to them and it was not a secret to the early church. The apostles understood themselves to be communicating God's inerrant truth to the church and the Thessalonians through this instruction were to consider the letter as coming from God to them not merely from Paul and his team.

The oath language here might be a little confusing. Neither Paul nor the congregation is agreeing to an oath in this instance. The verb it just means to adjure.

[34 : 21] I adjure you. It means to bind. It's an expression of authority. So that speaking with a unique apostolic authority given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul bound these Christians.

He charged this church to ensure that the letter was read in the public gathering and that each believer would be held accountable to what it says.

That's what this instruction is about. In other words, the final instruction is that the church recognizes the apostolic scriptures, that the church holds them as its supreme authority, and that the church keeps them at the center of their worship.

Remember, it seems that everything Paul's instructing here really has kind of a bent toward their public gathering, what they're doing together. Now, why would Paul bind them to such a command? Because he understood that what he was writing was from God, and as he said in chapter 2 in verse 13, it is the word of God given through the apostles that is, quote, at work in us.

[35 : 40] How are they to persevere? Through the word. How are they to grow in holiness and sanctification? Through the word. How are they to know how to pray?

Through the word. How are they to know how to love? Through the word. The Spirit uses the word to do his work. Paul knows it, and so he binds the church to this.

And we know any church that diminishes in any way. The authority and the centrality of the Bible will eventually lose the gospel.

At first, it may just seem like a minor change in hermeneutic principle as we see happening all over the place right now in American churches.

to say, well, God only meant this instruction to be applicable to us. This instruction only meant something to them. That's a bad hermeneutic that diminishes the authority of the scripture.

[36 : 49] It diminishes the centrality of the scripture, and it sets a church on the path to apostasy. They will lose the gospel. And historically, look around you at the churches in this community.

Those who started on that path do not have the gospel. Julie and I took Ashlyn to a concert the other day at a church in our community. She was playing with the orchestra.

And in their lobby, I could have picked up a pin, a button, to put on my shirt that says, what are my pronouns? Just ask me. A church that Sunday by Sunday proclaims to know Christ and to preach his gospel.

They've lost the gospel. gospel. Why? Because at some point along the way, they've moved away from the authority and the centrality of the scriptures.

Churches that do not have a pulpit at the center, that are not preaching sermons from the Bible, but homilies from movies or personal anecdotes.

[38 : 02] They will lose the gospel. We must not do that. We can't. This is just another reminder why here in this instruction.

We need to keep the scriptures at the center of all that we do. We must preach the Bible. Bible. We must read the Bible. We must pray the Bible. We must sing the Bible. And all of that in our worship services.

That's what should be at the heart of what we're doing. Letting God work through his word. All our beliefs and behaviors must be weighed against the word of God. And anything found in opposition to it must be repented of.

And we must be submitted to the scriptures. As God's people, we must hold a high view of God's word. And we cannot waver on this.

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith so helpfully tells us it is the perfect treasure of heavenly instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter.

[39 : 12] It reveals the principles by which God will judge us. And therefore is and shall remain to the end of the world the true center of Christian union and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, all human creeds, and all opinions must be tried.

What does Paul mean when he says, I bind you to read this letter to everybody. Don't leave anybody out. He means this is the authoritative word of God. It must hold supreme authority over your life, and it should be at the center of everything you're doing as a church in Thessalonica.

And that truth holds true for the church in Cornelius as well. Now that's the three instructions. Let me close with the blessing, and it's simple. Verse 28. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. unsurprisingly, Paul officially ends the letter on a note of grace. The unmerited favor of the Lord Jesus Christ found supremely in the gospel of his death and resurrection and lordship.

Paul brought that grace, quote, to them in chapter 1, verse 1. He says, Paul, to the Christians in Thessalonica, I bring grace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[40 : 46] When he closes the letter, he changes it just a little bit, doesn't he? Now, as he signs off, he prays that the grace of Jesus will go with them.

It's grace from beginning to end. That's what Christianity is. It's grace from beginning to end. And that's my prayer for you today.

That you will know the grace of God in the gospel of the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And that the outpouring of his grace will go with you until he comes.

He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Let's pray.