

Paul's Appeal for Prayer

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's now begin our worship this evening. We're going to sing, first of all, in Psalm 107. Psalm 107 on page 143, and we're singing to a tune Peter some, verses 1 to 9.

O thank the Lord, for He is good, His love endures always. Let those whom God redeemed say this, those rescued by His grace. He saved them from their enemies and brought them from the lands, from east and west, from north and south, safe from oppressing hands. And so on, singing down as far as verse 9 to tune Peter some, that's Psalm 107. We stand to sing these verses.

O thank the Lord, for He is good, His love endures always. Let those whom God redeemed say this, those rescued by His grace. He saved them from their enemies and brought them from the lands, from east and west, from north and south, safe from oppressing hands.

Some wondered in the desert ways, not finding any way, to reach a city where they might obtain a place to stay. Their life unspent, dwelling past, in thirst and emptiness. Then in despair they saw the Lord, who saved them from distress.

who saved them from distress. Straight was the path He led them on, a city to attain.

[2 : 4 0] So for the Lord's unfailing love, let them give thanks again. And for the awesome deeds of power, which He for them achieved, for hungry souls He filled with good, the thirsty He released.

Let's now engage in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Almighty and gracious God, help us as we bow in your presence to truly take note of these words that we have been singing in your praise.

O Lord our God, we give thanks to you tonight, that your mercy and your grace are so abundant toward us. And we give thanks for the way that you constantly lead your people, for the way that you have this glorious end in view for them, that you will bring them into that city that has foundations, of which you are the builder and maker.

We acknowledge, O Lord, that much happens from the time of our birth to our leaving this world. But we thank you that by your grace you guide your people, and all the things that take place in their experience are experiences by which they return their thanks and draw near to your independence.

Forgive us, Lord, we pray, for our shortcomings, even in regard to this. There are so many ways in which you bless us from day to day. You bless us in the ordinary course of life, which we cannot itself separate from those spiritual blessings that are in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 3 8] We give thanks, O Lord, that tonight we gather to worship you, to fall down in adoration before you, the God who created heaven and earth and all that is in them, the God who counts the number of the stars and names them every one.

We cannot, Lord, even reach in our own vision to the stars around us in the universe in the way in which we seek, Lord, in admiration to look upon the work of your hand.

We thank you, Lord, that you know them each one. And we give thanks that your greatness is thereby described for us as your word sets out for us those aspects of your being and of your works that your people admire.

Lord, help us, we pray, to come believing that you are God and believing that you are the rewarder of those who faithfully seek you. We thank you tonight, Lord, that we come in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

We thank you for the assurance that you give us that all who come in his name and pleading, O Lord, his merits before you are accepted by you and received into fellowship with himself and with you as our Father.

[5 : 56] We bless you, Lord, for the work of your Holy Spirit and for the way that we can look back upon even this congregation itself and know with gratitude and give thanks that your Spirit has been at work here over many generations.

As many congregations, as many congregations also can say. Lord, we thank you that this gives us encouragement. What you have promised to your people is that as you have blessed them in the past, so your blessing will continue through the generations to come of your people.

We take encouragement, O Lord, tonight from the assurance of your own work, the assurance of your promises toward us, the assurance that you will bring your people to know yourself.

And that you know those that are yours and that you know those that are yours and that your foundation stands sure, having this seal that the Lord knows those who are his.

And let all who name the name of God depart from wickedness. Bless us, Lord, we pray under your word. Sanctify us under your word. Set us apart once again in such a way that would be aware of your claim upon us.

[7 : 08] To be your people, to be your witnesses in this world. Continue to bless us, we pray, as a congregation. Bless us, O Lord, under your word especially. May we find that the fruit of righteousness is produced steadily in our own lives and our experience.

May we prove to be, O Lord, faithful and willing, a testimony to the world around us of your grace and of your love. And we ask, Lord, that we may prize those things by which you reveal yourself to us.

Help us especially in these days when so much change is taking place around us. When we hear of so many changes taking place amongst your own believing people. Lord, we pray that you would enable us to hold firm to the rock that is Jesus himself.

And help us to carry forward those great truths that you have delivered unto us. That were delivered once for all to the saints of God. Help us, O Lord, to be proud of them.

To hold on to them in such a way that would truly commend them steadfastly to the generation we belong to. And we ask, O Lord, that the gospel may come to flourish once again in our midst.

[8 : 23] We pray that the power of your Holy Spirit will apply the teaching of your word, the preaching of your word to this generation we belong to. Remember our young people.

And while we pray, O Lord, for those who are of an older age group as well. We do remember, O Lord, that those young ones who are coming up now to be taught under the gospel.

Are those who would carry the banner of Christ in the future. We thank you that they belong to your church even from their infancy as your promises reach them in your grace.

And we pray that as they are nurtured under the gospel, that their own lives, Lord, may develop in such a way that they will be themselves increasingly known as the people of God.

Remember each and every family who faithfully bring their children to worship, to the Sunday school, to other activities. And we pray, O Lord, for each and every family that you would bless them.

[9 : 22] Bless them, we pray, with your own protective care in days when we know there is so much around us that seeks to bring our children and our young people away from the things of God.

Away from the things that make for a wholesome and steady life. And we ask that you would protect them to help them walk in the ways of your truth.

Bless, we pray, all who tonight need you in particular ways as we think of those who tonight mourn the passing of loved ones in our congregation here and in the community.

O Lord, draw near to them, we pray. Give them the grace and the strength that they require. Give them a sense of their need of you, a sense of drawing their strength from you so that they will come to seek you with all their heart and seek your comfort and your direction at this time.

We pray, O Lord, not only for those but for others we hear of as well. Remember the family of the diver who tragically died in these past days here in the harbor.

[10 : 31] We ask that you would, Lord, draw near to them, though we don't know them. We thank you that you know them and you're able to console their hearts and bring to them the comfort which you alone are able to bring.

We ask, Lord, your blessing too for those of our number who experience illness at this time. We pray for them. Those recovering from illness, from surgery, those anticipating treatment in the days to come.

Lord, remember them, we pray. Give them that calmness of heart that would trust and rely upon you. And we pray, O Lord, that you would grant us your blessing now as we seek here to remain faithful, as we seek to remain active in our faith and in our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we ask that your blessing will go with us now through the week ahead, that all the activities that are anticipated taking place in the congregation will know your blessing.

And we ask, O God, that all of this will ultimately work towards your glory and your praise, and that we may have that as our great aim and the purpose for our lives and for all that we do, to bring glory and honor to the name of God, our Savior.

[11 : 48] Receive us, we pray, and pardon our sins. For Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to sing again to God's praise. Our singing this time is Psalm 102, the second version.

Psalm 102. That's on page 368. Singing to a tune, Herongate. And it's verses 16 to 22. God in his glory shall appear when Zion he builds and repairs.

He shall regard and lend his ear unto the needy's humble prayers. The afflicted's prayer he will not scorn. All times this shall be on record. And generations yet unborn shall praise and magnify the Lord.

The focus tonight is going to be on prayer as we turn to God's Word shortly. So these psalms themselves speak in different ways about prayer, the place of prayer, the importance of prayer, the purpose of prayer, different other aspects of prayer as well, in the psalms we're singing tonight.

So Psalm 102, page 368, from verse 16. God in his glory shall appear. God in his glory shall appear.

[13 : 11] When Zion he builds and prepares, He shall regard and lend his ear unto the needy's humble prayers.

The afflicted's prayer he will not scorn. All times this shall be on record.

And generations yet unborn shall praise and magnify the Lord.

He promised, He promised, He promised, He blessed, Looked out, The earth he knew,
From heaven on high, To hear the prisoners' warning groan, and feed them that are
doomed to die.

That Zion and Jerusalem too, his name and rich may well record.

[15 : 08] When people and their kingdoms do, assemble all to praise the Lord.

Now let's turn to read God's Word as we find that in Paul's second letter to the
Thessalonians, chapter 3. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, reading chapter 3 of
that letter.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

of Christ. Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you
keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition
that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because
we were not idle when we were with you. Nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying
for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any
of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an
example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command, if
anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in
idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies. Now such persons we command and
encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. As
for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say
in this letter, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him, that he may be
ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. Now may the God
of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. I,
Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is a sign of genuineness in every letter of
mine. It is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. And so may
God follow with his blessing once again this reading of his own word. Now before we turn
to this passage, let's sing again. We're singing in Psalm 31. Psalm 31 in Sing Psalms,
that's on page 36.

Singing verses 1 to 6. It's shown as Marel. In you I've taken refuge, Lord. You are my
shelter in distress. Oh, let me never be ashamed, but save me in your righteousness.
Lord, turn your ear to hear my cry. Come quickly to deliver me, and be my rock and firm
defense, my stronghold and security. You are my fortress and my rock. For your name's
sake, be my sure guide. Preserve me from the trap that's set. You are the refuge where I
hide. Redeem me, Lord, O God of truth. My spirit I commit to you. I hate all those who
trust false gods. I trust the Lord, for he is true. These verses, Psalm 31. In you I've taken
refuge, Lord.

[19 : 13] In you I've taken refuge, Lord. You are my shelter in distress. Oh, let me never be
ashamed, but save me in your righteousness. Lord, turn you here to hear my cry. Come
quickly to deliver me, and be my rock and firm defense. You are my fortress and my rock.
For your save me, be my sure guide. Preserve me from the top of the sand. You are the
refuge where I hide.

redeem me, Lord, O God of truth. My spirit I commit to you. I hate all those who trust false
gods. I trust the Lord. So, you are my hope and I love you. I love you. I love you. I love
you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.

Now if you turn with me please to the passage we read in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and reading again from the beginning. Finally brothers pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men for not all have faith but the Lord is faithful he will establish you and guard you against the evil one and we have confidence in the Lord about you that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

Well the Bible gives us many topics for prayer. It gives us much information indeed as to what we should pray for both in our own individuals in the individual sense and also in a congregational setting. Those things that we find emphasized as Paul and others wrote to these churches to draw their minds to the importance of prayer and the reasons that they needed to give such attention to prayer. But the Bible also gives us God also gives us not only things to pray for, subjects for prayer, topics for prayer, he also gives us motives for prayer, the purpose of prayer, what prayer is for, what promises are attached to prayer, how we should pray, how we should not pray, and even sometimes what not to pray for. But this is the information we have for our benefit in these verses as well. And in verses 1 and 2 we find a request there for two things that Paul is actually commanding as he puts it in the passage these Christians in the Thessalonian church to pray for. He's saying first of all pray for us and there's a purpose behind that request. Pray for us so that the Word of God may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you. So he's praying first of all he asks them to pray for them, for the gospel messengers, himself and those who carry the message of the gospel and proclaim the message of the gospel.

And then he goes on to secondly ask that they pray that they may be delivered from wicked and evil men for not all men have faith. In other words there's a prayer for the gospel message to be blessed and a prayer for the gospel messenger to be protected. And they both fit very nicely together. You can't separate the one from the other. And it's interesting some of the detail that you find in regard to this as we go to these verses now as they appear there before us. First of all he's saying pray for us.

[24 : 41] Now as he wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul makes it clear that he was very much aware himself where his enabling came from, where the power that was required for the gospel to be effective came from. In the first chapter of the first epistle he said we give thanks to God that he has chosen you brothers loved by God because our gospel came to you not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. He knew that the gospel as it was effective in Thessalonica and in every other place was effective precisely because God blessed it. There wasn't any methodology on the part of Paul himself though he didn't actually shy away from thinking about the methods he used to present the gospel and in fact you find that he presented the gospel in various ways. For example in the city of Athens he presented the gospel to the Jews as he always did to the Jews going to the Old Testament and arguing from the Old Testament towards Jesus and his identity and the gospel in Christ. But when he spoke to the people of Athens themselves these pagan people he took as a starting point the altar that he came across in the city that he came across in the city that was dedicated in the inscription to the unknown God. He didn't start with the Old Testament he didn't start with the law of God he didn't start with the promises that God had established in covenant with his people in the days of the Old Testament he started with this. That was the starting point he worked from this altar that they had that they had erected and I suppose they were amongst all the many idols that Athens was crammed full of there was maybe something in the minds of these Athenians that perhaps they must they must actually dedicate this to the unknown God in case they missed one out. And that's where Paul started and he he said I'm going to present to you the God that I know the God who created all things that was a starting point God as creator and he moved from there to to set out for them God as the Savior God in grace in Jesus Christ.

There's a lot of teaching in that itself for us that we don't just rush into presenting the gospel in exactly the same way whatever our context is. Anyway coming back to 2 Thessalonians you find here pray for us where the power of God had established a church in Thessalonica now he's saying pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored. Because even in Paul's day the word was not advancing even as Paul himself would desire and pray for there were times when the word was not advancing in the way that Paul himself would have liked and it's true even of an apostle that there were disappointments that there were things which he would bring to God and sometimes even ring out his heart as he saw resistance to the gospel and opposition to the gospel and twisting of the gospel and defections from the gospel things which themselves prevented the word from running ahead effectively in the experience of these people. And so what he's saying is pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored. Now he's not just saying to these Christians pray for us full stop. He's giving a reason and a purpose why they should pray for him and for his companions and for those like-minded who are preaching the gospel. It's so that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored. His purpose is the gospel itself. His purpose is the advance of the word of God, the effectiveness of the word of God.

But he's saying pray for us. He's not just saying pray for the gospel to advance. He knows that he is the instrument of God in order to proclaim the gospel to the world of his day. And so he's asking pray that God will bless us so that the gospel will advance. And that's how it is down to the present day as you very well know. And when there's perhaps more of a danger that preaching itself will be more and more set aside as such a central part of the worship, the gathered worship of God, we have to take note of these very important passages of the apostle where he sets out the importance of preaching, the purpose of preaching, all the things that are attached to the preaching of the gospel. And we have to retain these and keep these, and we have to emphasize these and promote these. And we have to actually show the word of our day that we agree with the word of God that this is the method, the primary method that God uses in order to bring people to know himself. It's a wonderful thing, isn't it, that the gospel that

God uses, the preaching of God's word, the preaching of the gospel that he uses to bring people to know himself, to bring them to be converted, to be born again. That very same gospel is the gospel through which these people are then fed spiritually. He doesn't bring the gospel just so that people can be converted and then turn to something else. And Paul is not saying to pray for him and for his companions, for one or the other. He's saying pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored. And that's going to include new converts. It's going to include those who are already converted to be built up in the faith. And that's why he's saying, brethren, pray for us.

[30 : 27] Now, he's using what seems to be athletic language or imagery here. Paul, as you know, uses that from time to time. And these words that he's using here, the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored.

Something you could illustrate perhaps by what you see when there are major athletic games such as the Olympics or the World Championships. I think it's still the case that when a marathon is run, it's run around the streets of whatever city or place the games are taking place in. But then for the final part of the race, those who are running the marathon will actually come and enter the stadium where the crowd are waiting for them. The other things are going on and they're waiting for them to appear. They've run all of these miles. What is it, 26 something miles? And they've run all these miles. And here they are the final stage doing a lap or maybe two of the stadium when they come back.

And as soon as the first one appears at the head of the race, whoever's first into the stadium, running the marathon as they appear through the gates of the stadium, this mighty shout goes up.

There's a wonderful acclaim. There's a wonderful reception. There's an acknowledgement. Well, they're back. And here's the first one. And let's acclaim them. Let's actually applaud what they've done.

Let's show out praise for their achievement. And that's the kind of imagery that you find here that Paul is actually using when he's saying, pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored. Because out in that world tonight, the word of God is not in most of it, at least speeding ahead and honored. There isn't a welcome given to the word of God. There isn't a welcome given to the gospel such as we would want, such as we would desire, such as we pray for. But this is what Paul is reminding us of. For that welcome to actually be produced and come to take place, what do we need to do? We need to pray for the preaching of the gospel. We need to pray for the gospel, however it's actually disseminated amongst people. Not just the preaching of it, though that's primarily what Paul has in mind, but everything that accompanies the preaching of the word in order to actually present the truth of God to the current generation.

[32 : 42] He's saying, pray for us that the reception given to the word may be one of great welcome, that be a great acclaim and applause in the hearts of human beings, bringing into their own experience through faith the provision God has made in grace and the gospel in Jesus Christ. Stornoway needs the gospel.

Our country areas need the gospel. Glasgow needs the gospel. Areas of the country where the gospel has receded so much over the years needs the gospel. We have church plants going on different parts of our land, our own denomination planting churches. What's that about? Well, the purpose for that is that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored, that people will come in receiving the message of the word of God, come to turn to God, come to turn to Christ, come to give their lives to the Savior. That's what it's about. But he's saying, pray for us. Pray for those who actually bring the gospel before people like yourselves in these days as well. Now, this is not, therefore, about praise and honor for the messenger for the church. It's not about bringing ourselves into the picture, as it were, so that we will be elevated. Whatever you do, don't elevate ministers. Don't elevate us beyond what God's own calling does. We're not here to receive praise from you for ourselves. We're here as ambassadors for

Christ. We're here as those who present the gospel in the name of Christ and for the glory of Christ. And what he's saying is, oh, pray for us, brothers, so that the word of God may speed. He's not saying, pray for us so that we'll have great prestige. There are preachers in the world tonight, and really, most of what they're about is prestige for themselves. Prestige and honor and a place, celebrity preachers, if you like. This is not what Paul is about. He's not interested in being a celebrity preacher. He's not interested in personal prestige. He's interested in Christ, and Christ actually being made known to people. He's interested and concerned for people to be saved, for people in the churches that he's writing to hold on to the truth tenaciously, to promote that truth, not to defect from that truth. All of these things Paul is seeking their prayers for, not for himself, not for himself per se, but for himself for this purpose, that the word may be received and recognized and honored. And that tonight is what we ourselves also appeal for. And you see, Paul is not in any way embarrassed by presenting himself in this way to the people that he's writing to. And while certainly we have to be careful in presenting ourselves as preachers of the gospel to the likes of yourselves in what we say and what we do, we should never be embarrassed in saying, pray for us, pray for me, pray for Calamordo, pray for us, and pray for all who are presenting the gospel, but especially in our own context here in this congregation. Brothers, sisters, pray for us. Why? So that the word of God may actually flow forth with power and be received with honor and speed ahead and be honored.

So that our young people may come to turn to the Lord and give themselves to the Lord. So the families in this congregation may come to be believing families, worshipping families, witnessing families, lights in this dark world, so that we see the blessing of God of his word in these contexts. And you see, what he's saying is that as it happened among you, so that this will again happen elsewhere. He's drawing their minds to the fact that what happened with themselves, that the word of God did indeed speed ahead and was honored as they knew its blessing from God in their midst. Now he's saying, you've known that, but you're not to keep that to yourselves.

Pray for us so that this may be repeated, that this may spread forth. And that's how it is for ourselves as well. We pray for individuals to be converted, to be saved. We pray for the people of God to be nourished and fed and grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[37 : 30] We pray for families. We pray that the gospel may speed ahead in the context of families, that they come under its blessing. We pray that the gospel may speed ahead and be blessed in terms of marriages, relationships.

The word of God may speed abroad and be blessed by God to our children, to our teenagers, to those who are at that stage in between childhood and adulthood.

There's so much to hinder the gospel. But one thing that we might say hinders it as much as anything else is prayerlessness. There's lack of prayer for its speeding ahead and its being blessed through the preaching of the word.

So, that's Paul's appeal to the Thessalonians. That's the appeal of Scripture to ourselves tonight. It's not me making the appeal, though I would hope to actually say this is my appeal as well as I fall into line with the thinking of the apostle as it is right and becoming of me to do so as a minister of the gospel, as your minister of the gospel.

Brethren, pray for us. Pray for us so that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored. And let me just make an appeal here for prayer, not just for individual, private prayer, personal prayer, but also for our prayer meetings.

[39 : 04] You know, if you go online to just Google in, why is the prayer meeting important? You'll actually find lots of responses in different parts of the world, and I only just checked it very briefly.

But sadly, so much of these responses is on the part of individuals, whether they're ministers or congregations, that really just say, well, the percentage of their people who actually attend regularly the prayer meetings of the church is very much less than it ought to be.

And you'll find different percentages there. And virtually all of these are complaining about the same thing, that it's so difficult to persuade people to attend the prayer meetings. Now, we all have duties.

We all have family duties. We all have various things that would legitimately keep us at times from attending the weekly meeting, the weekly meeting for prayer, for study of the Bible in more depth.

But remember, the prayer meeting contributes to your personal growth, but it also strengthens the bonds between the believing people of God when they gather together in the setting of prayer and of studying the Bible together and its teaching.

[40 : 15] It's really part of what the apostle elsewhere calls bearing one another's burdens. We cannot bear one another's burdens meaningfully and fully just by praying on our own at home and never coming to meet together for prayer.

We bear one another's burdens when we are together sharing these burdens, praying over these burdens, presenting these burdens to God. The prayer meeting is where we share needs and requests and praises, where we engage together in prayer for the gospel to advance.

Paul is not suggesting here that this is something these Christians do privately or only privately. There's no suggestion at all of that. And I'm sure, in fact, that the main emphasis is when you come together is what he would mean, pray for us.

And it's a way, too, of expressing our concern for the gospel to advance, to plead with God for His blessing of the gospel, for His direction in the ways of evangelism and outreach and witnessing.

We pray all these things before God together. It's a way of expressing as well and experiencing and valuing our unity in Christ.

[41 : 35] If we value our unity in Christ, then we value being together. We value what the writer to the Hebrews, as he put it, do not neglect the gathering of yourselves together as the manner of some is.

and what was his purpose in doing that? It was precisely that they stimulate one another to love and to good works. It wasn't just something that they enjoyed fellowship, they enjoyed having a cup of tea or a cup of coffee or something, maybe that comes into it, there's nothing wrong with that, but his main concern was so that they stimulate each other to love and to good works.

It's very difficult to stimulate yourself to love when you're on your own, when you're not with the Lord's believing people. So here's, you might say, our appeal tonight.

Brethren, sisters, pray for us. Pray for us together. Pray for us. Come together for prayer. Come together to plead with God for his word, to speed ahead and be honored so that the blessing of God will flow through this congregation and out into the world because through prayer lots of things by God's blessing can be seen to take place.

But then secondly, he's saying pray for the gospel messenger to be protected. Pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men for not all have faith.

[43 : 16] But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you. Now it's not obvious what the opposition is there, though at other times Paul mentions more specifically what his opponents, whose opponents are and what they're like.

It may well be that this was also from within the church and it's really quite a thought-provoking thing to actually take note of how soon heresies and departures from the faith set in even while the apostles were still living and how much more since then.

So as he's saying pray for us that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. And what he means by that includes the likes of false teaching. Look at how often false teaching is mentioned in these letters of the apostle.

Whether it's to these churches or to the likes of Timothy and Titus. False teaching that was spreading as he put it to Timothy like a gangrene which if it's left alone just makes its way and spreads throughout any body of people any church.

Well he's saying pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored because the more the word of God is blessed to you the more you pray together that your own life will be protected against decay and defection so the more that will contribute to the wholeness and the well-being of the church.

[44 : 41] Pray for us that it may speed ahead and be honored among you for not all have faith. That's a very solemn statement.

Not all have faith. Especially if the apostle was thinking and including as I'm sure he was some within the church as it was seen in places like Thessalonica.

Not all have faith. Not all are committed to Christ. What he's saying here is far from it. Some are even opposed to him. Some do their best to stand against the progress of the gospel.

And it's no different in our day is it? In fact, it's very obvious that that's still the case. The gospel is hindered though God of course is ultimately sovereignly in control of all things of all events but the gospel is certainly effectively hindered when people actually defect from the gospel when ministers of the gospel certainly defect from the gospel begin teaching things which are at odds with the teaching of scripture whether it's about human behavior or certain doctrines that are foundational to an understanding of salvation all of those things hinder the gospel and we need your prayer for us to be protected against that decline against that slide into heresy.

Martin Lloyd-Jones once said somewhere in his writings every institution has in itself the capacity to turn into the opposite of itself and that's quite true of a church and a congregation as well because we're human beings we're flawed human beings even as Christians we have a tendency towards things which we ought to shun and put behind us and what we pray for is that we will be kept from that that you'll be kept from that that we as preachers of the gospel will be kept from teaching or coming to understand anything other than apostolic doctrine apostolic teaching that was passed on by the apostles to those who came after him to these churches that were taught under their ministry.

[47 : 01] Brethren he says pray for us that the word of God may speed ahead and be honored for not all have faith that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men.

He uses words here which sometimes maybe today are words which folk find it very difficult to accept you wouldn't find the ordinary man in the street tonight in Stornway accepting of himself or of herself that actually essentially in their inner spiritual being they're wicked regard wickedness as something done by great criminals someone who's gone out to murder someone someone who's actually committed murder or a serious crime like that that's wickedness but don't tell me there's wickedness in my heart I've never done anything like that that's the reaction that's the kind of understanding you meet with whereas God sets out in his word the word wicked doesn't mean just desperately wicked in a public and open sense in that way wickedness is whatever is turned against God whatever is turned effectively against the gospel whatever is deliberately seeking to thwart the gospel seeking to stand in the way of its advance wherever it is wherever it comes from wherever you find it

Paul is not ashamed to say that all men have not faith please he says I appeal to you he's actually commanding them pray for us so that we be delivered from wicked and evil men you see because Paul was concerned that the gospel would advance all the time and when you read the book of Acts and you read his imprisonments and you read the way that even in Philippi as he wrote to the Philippians as we saw going through Philippians not so long ago he was concerned of course to set out for the Philippians that even in Caesar's households there were Christians there were people that come to know the Lord the gospel had reached and penetrated there but Paul is under no illusion that wickedness and wicked people are set and determined against the gospel and he's saying pray that we may be delivered from them that the gospel will not be thwarted that the gospel will advance but you see how he also counters this this reality and it's a reality that we ourselves know in our day wicked and evil men people who are marked by by a determined opposition to God a determined opposition to elevate ungodliness remember ungodliness is no mere negative thing it's a positive sinfulness and the ungodliness of our day is an ungodliness that seeks in a very determined way if it doesn't actually undermine the gospel and certainly divert or deflect it away from its essential teaching then it becomes no gospel at all so pray for us that we be kept that we be protected that we be guarded that God will look after us that God will see to it that we don't defect that we don't actually in any way prove to be untrue to the God who has called us pray that for yourself too pray that for the congregation pray that we will continue in seeking to be faithful to God to look to God's own faithfulness as he's putting it here not all have faith but the Lord is faithful he says not all have faith there are some who don't have faith at all but God is faithful he's full of faithfulness he's never unfaithful now there's a great truth

God is never unfaithful you can depend on God what God says is what God will do what God says he is like that is what he's truly like and so you can come at all times to depend on what God is saying that it is the very truth take that as truth not as the world today would define truth and as some elements in the church would define truth as just something relative something that moves and is malleable and changes from generation to generation depending on what's current in the culture of the day God is faithful and he is faithful in keeping us in his truth and by his truth to actually keep on presenting the gospel the word of Christ to the generation we belong to and you see that's a deliberate contrast then between not all have faith but the Lord is faithful oh how many times we in our lives

I mean we in terms of our Christian life not just preaching the gospel how many times we as Christians you and I just have to stop and say Lord I'm so thankful that you are faithful that you are faithful to your word that you are faithful to your promises that when I see of my own tendency when I see the sin of my own heart when I see how slow I am to learn when I see how often I go back to the same things that I do that I should not have done and I keep repeating the mistakes that I've made and the sins that I've actually committed in your presence Lord I thank you that you are faithful that your faithfulness will never ever be changed of course God's faithfulness means he's faithful against those who oppose him as well he will do as he has spoken and so he's saying pray for us for God himself is faithful in other words that's a great motive to prayer isn't it that God is really saying through that that your prayers are heard by him that your prayers will be answered by him maybe not exactly when or how you actually anticipate them but God hears and God takes note and God puts in his diary every single moment the prayers that his people pray to him the requests that they make to him the thanksgivings that they send up to him they're not lost on God and as God takes note of them so we can seek God to answer our prayers he will establish you and guard you against the evil one we have confidence in the Lord about you that you are doing and will do the things that we command now we can't command you as preachers of the gospel only an apostle could say that coming with that force and authority that God gave the apostle to say such a thing we command you what we are doing is following the command of scripture and saying this is what God commands this is what he requires and so tonight that's what he requires of us we have confidence he says in the Lord that you are doing and will do the things that we command and he finishes by saying may the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ well how many sermons are in that final verse alone may the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ and commentators are divided as to whether

[54 : 29] Paul means the love of God himself or the love of his people for God or whether he means the steadfastness of Christ himself or steadfastness on the part of his people as the people of Christ it seems best to take it as in the first sense that this is the love of God himself that God will direct you direct your hearts to the love of God because that ultimately really is where our security is isn't it it's not my love for God because that sometimes sadly comes and goes or wanes at least sometimes as far less than it should be and is never as much as it should be but you can never say that of God's love and the provision that God's love has made for his people when God as he has has loved his people he has loved them with that love that has provided everything they need for them a saviour and all that comes with him and you remember how these probably little used and I'm speaking to myself too little used epistle the epistle of Jude near the end of the Bible remember how Jude sets out there remember he he had it in mind to write about some things which belonged to foundational things of the gospel the things about our common salvation he says but I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints for certain people have crept in unnoticed he's talking about the church crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord

Jesus Christ but what I'm concerned is how he actually finishes that short letter you he says beloved building yourselves up in your most holy faith praying in the Holy Spirit keep yourselves in the love of God you see how that goes together you beloved despite all that you see of defections despite all that you know is happening in the world or even in the church elsewhere this is he says what you must do building yourselves up in your most holy faith using God's truth to advance in your godliness in your Christianity in your commitment to Christ in your service for the Lord in your holiness of life doing that he says praying in the Holy Spirit keep yourselves in the love of God how do you keep yourself in the love of God what does that mean well it means essentially the love with which

God has loved his people and the provision that he's made for in that love including the gospel keep yourselves in that don't be led away from something that is other than God's loving provision for you and keep yourselves under this conviction that in God's love everything is provided that sinners need for salvation there is no greater subject than the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord which is why Paul finishes that great chapter in Romans chapter 8 where he's persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord and interestingly he put it that way it doesn't just say able to separate us from God or able to separate us from Jesus

Christ able to separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus our Lord the love that sent his son into this world to die the death of the cross the love that looks in a fatherly way that looks after his people the love of God that's where your security the base of your security is and as you know that and as you work from that you're building up yourself in your most holy faith keep yourselves in the love of God pray for us pray for yourselves keep on praying don't stop praying add to the praying you're presently doing come together for prayer don't ever lose an opportunity to be together for prayer and pray that we be kept for not all have faith let's pray we give thanks

Lord for all the appeals and all the commands of your word and we give thanks that as you give faith to your people so you give them that faith that itself knows of these aspects of your word registering in their hearts we ask that you would enable us Lord in the exercise of our faith to rejoice at all the things you give us to rejoice in to tremble at your threatenings to take note of the warnings that you give us in scripture to hold to your great and glorious promises and to look forward expectantly that you will indeed establish us that you will continue to provide for us receive our thanks now we pray and cleanse us from the many sins for Jesus sake amen we're going to sing now in conclusion in psalm 71 psalm 71 this is on page 310 verses 1 to 5

[60 : 44] O Lord my hope and confidence is placed in thee alone then let thy servant never be put to confusion let me in thy righteousness from thee deliverance have cause me escape incline thy ear unto me and me save so on down to verse 5 free me my God from wicked hands hands cruel and unjust for thou O Lord God art my hope and from my youth my trust obedience confidence.

O Lord, my hope and confidence is placed in thee alone.

Then let thy servant ever be new to your future.

And let me in thy righteousness from the given the time.

Cause me escape, then find my ear unto me and be saved.

[62 : 37] Be thou my dwelling hope to which I ever may resort.

Thou give'st commandment me to save, for thou'rt my rock and fort.

Free me, my God, from wicked hands, and through the land of just.

For thou, O Lord, art my hope, and from my youth my trust.

Amen. I'll go to the main door after the benediction. And now may grace and mercy and peace from God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

[63 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.
Amen.