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Take A Stand 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 Part 5

Paul had become separated from the Thessalonian Church. He had been unable to return to them because of Satanic opposition. But he was still extremely concerned about how they were doing. He had seen them spiritually born which was the emphasis of chapter one. He had been involved in personally nurturing the church which was the emphasis of chapter two. But he was unsure about whether or not they were standing firm in the Lord, which is the emphasis of chapter three.

In seeking to find out more about their condition and to help and assist them, we see Paul taking two very specific actions.

He assisted them by sending a helper (VV. 1-10). He sent Timothy to them. Even though this left him alone in Athens, yet he was willing to do this. Not because it was best for him but rather it was best for the Thessalonians.

What was the result of the visit? Timothy returned to give Paul an excellent report and Paul was ecstatic. Paul explained this ecstasy to the Thessalonians by saying in **V. 8 “for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.”** There was no greater earthly joy for Paul than witnessing the spiritual progress of people. Especially people that he had personally cared for.

But even more important than sending a helper, he prayed for them. He records this prayer on behalf of the Thessalonians in **VV. 11-13.** Let us read the passage. **“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you. (13) so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”**

Paul in this prayer shared with the Thessalonians three specific and precise prayers.

1) He prayed that they would be able to come to the Thessalonians. We saw this in **V. 11 “Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you.....”** We learned from this request the importance of turning our thoughts into prayers. Paul was continually thinking about the Thessalonians and he would use those occasions to pray for them.

2) He also prayed that they would increase and abound in love. We saw this in **V. 12 “and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you.”** This is an extraordinary thought. It is an extraordinary prayer. We need to understand the importance of turning our thoughts into prayers. But we also need to understand the importance of thinking thoughts that flow from and are consistent with the Word of God, very much as we see here in this prayer by Paul. We need to understand the difference between praying maturely and praying immaturely.

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Let us now consider Paul's third request. I hope that we will learn from this last request that Paul makes on behalf of the Thessalonians the importance of perseverance. We need to understand that it is not enough for us to start well but to finish well. **Mt. 10:22** tells us that it is those who endure to the end that will be saved. Hopefully with this in mind we might renew our commitment to press forward to the finish line and run the race before us to win. What was Paul's third request?

THAT THEY WOULD BE ESTABLISHED UNBLAMABLE IN HOLINESS.

Let us read **V. 13** “so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”

Certainly it is Paul's desire that God would “**establish the hearts of the Thessalonians unblamable in holiness.**” And in that sense I am calling this Paul's third request. But it is a request that apparently naturally flows from his second request.

How are these two requests tied together? If we are increasing and abounding in love for the Christian community and for all men, it clearly demonstrates that God is actively involved in our lives. Paul makes this very clear in the very next chapter in verse 9. “**Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.**”

Paul does not say that “**you were taught**” to love. Paul says “**you are taught.**” When we come to Jesus to be delivered from our sins and are born again we are not worked with for a year or two and then dropped for lack of progress. The Lord will continue to bang away on us.

Isn't this true within our own homes. If you are a responsible parent who is committed to the task of parenting you are going to continue to work at helping and encouraging and prodding your children no matter what kind of progress they are making.

The only difference between ourselves and the Lord is the fact, whereas, we might fail. He will not. He has given us a wonderful promise in **Phil. 1:6** “**Be confident of this very thing that he who hath begun a good work in you will complete it in Christ Jesus.**” If becoming mature in Christ were up to us we might make a good show of it for a few years, loving our brothers and sisters in Christ reaching out in the name of Jesus to a lost world and then flame out. But praise God it is not up to us. It is up to God. He is going to continue to pound away at us. And he will be successful.

We should not only therefore expect that we would manifest a genuine love of the brethren and for all men now but we should expect an increasing an abounding love in the future. And all of this dramatically, and powerfully, testifies to us that we are in fact the children of God. And as our Father, God is wondrously and effectively molding and shaping us into the people He would have us to be. And we can therefore be confident that He will complete the work He has begun.

And what will this completed work look like when it is done. Let us go back and read the passage and look, particularly look at the third request.

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“Now may our God and Father Himself, and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; (First request) (12) And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another; and for all men, jut as we also do for you. (The second request and flowing from this second request is the third (13) so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. The third request was for PERSONAL PERFECT HOLINESS.

This should thrill us. This should excite us. **1 John 3:1-3 “See how great a love the father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared a yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.** Christians whether they fully understand it or can’t help themselves, will be continually seeking to live lives that are pure. Some people might find this preoccupation with purity and holiness to be very limiting but quite the opposite is true. It actually begins to allow us to enjoy and experience life as the Lord intended for us to enjoy and experience it.

When Adam sinned he did not lose his omniscience. He did not lose his omnipotence. He did not lose them because he never had them. But he lost his personal holiness. He had been separated from sin to God when God first created him but that was no longer true. And when he fell the whole of the human race fell with him. And since the fall an unquenchable thirst, an unsatiable hunger has been tearing at the soul of man. The world seeks to meet this pressing need by pursuing riches, accomplishments, power, and pleasure. What they do not understand is that this thirst and this hunger will not be satisfied until we once again enjoy perfect holy communion with God.

Christ did not come into this world just to save us from hell. But rather he came to save us from hell to establish a holy communion between ourselves and the Lord in heaven.

If you are here this morning and are a born again believer you are already well on your way to this glorious destiny. This journey toward glory in terms of our earthly pilgrimage began when we recognized our sinfulness and desired to be delivered from it by transferring our trust from ourselves and our own good works to Jesus Christ alone for our salvation.

At that moment in time we were placed or baptized into Jesus by the Holy Spirit. And everything that was true of Jesus in a spiritual sense became true of us.

In **1 Cor. 1:30** it says, **“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.** It doesn’t say, **“who will become to us righteousness and sanctification.”** But rather it says, **“he became to us.”** This is why we can come boldly into the presence of God in prayer and receive grace to help in the time of our need, because of our status, because of our position, because God sees us as holy in Christ Jesus.

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But God is not finished with us yet. It is not enough for Him to see us in Christ, He wants us to be like Christ.

In **Eph. 5:25** there is an exhortation to husbands that is very familiar to us. **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”** We are familiar with this exhortation but we may not be so familiar with the two verses that follow which says, **(26) “that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (27) that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.”**

When the Church is finally presented by the Lord to Himself all that had been lost in the fall of man will have been restored. And we will finally have entered into a place of rest for we will finally be holy even as He is holy and will be able to eternally dwell in eternal holy communion with God, not only positionally but experientially. This is where we are headed.

“But this is not where we are. We are well on our way, but we are not yet there. It is still future. When will this spiritual pilgrimage end? This spiritual pilgrimage will gloriously and triumphantly end when we actually find ourselves standing in the presence of God in our glorified and risen bodies.

Let us again look at the verse. **“so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”**

When believers die we will immediately find ourselves in the presence of God. **2 Cor. 5:9** tells us very clearly **“absent from the body present with the Lord.”** But this is not the event that Paul has in mind here at all. It is a different event. It is not when we die and enter into the presence of our God and Father. It is when we are in the presence of our God and Father **“at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”**

The event that is being referred to here where Paul hopes to see the Thessalonians with their hearts established unblamable in holiness is the “coming.” The Greek word translated coming is the word PAROUSIA. As I have shared in the past the PAROUSIA means “presence.” And it is used differently within different contexts. But when it is used in respect to the church we must understand it to be that time referred to by theologians as the rapture. It is the time when Christ returns to catch up the church to meet Him in the clouds.

I don’t believe that there can be any question that this is the event that Paul has in mind. But this reading might be confusing to some who are reading the NAS. It is confusing because it sounds like Christ is not coming “for” saints but “with” saints.

I believe the better translation is actually found in the NIV which says **“when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.”** The word **“saints”** I believe is misleading. The word is the greek word AGIOI which literally means “holy ones.” It certainly could be understood to be referring to “saints” or in other words “Christians” but it could also be referring to “angels.” And I believe that the “holy ones” that Paul is referring to here are exactly that.

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Paul is coming with all of the heavenly host, with all of the angels at the time of the rapture. And it is at the time of the rapture according to **1 Thess. 4:13-18** that the church receives her glorified bodies. It is at this point in time that our redemption is complete. Because as **Romans 8:18-25** the whole of the church, all church saints throughout all the centuries receive their glorified bodies. And it is to this event that the whole of the church is eagerly waiting. And it certainly is the event that Paul is referring to here.