

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

A Plea to Pray for Your Spiritual Leaders 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28 Part 1

We have now arrived at the final words of the Apostle in this epistle. It is written as a postscript. It is the very last thought he wants to leave with the Thessalonians and it is therefore important that we consider seriously what Paul communicates in these very few concluding verses. This final postscript contains three exhortations and a benediction.

AN EXHORTATION TO PRAY FOR THEIR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

One of the responsibilities of spiritual leaders is to pray for the lives of those they oversee. Many of us are familiar with the story of in **Acts 7** where the apostles appointed seven men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to manage the problem with the disbursement of food to those who were in need. The apostles did this in order to make sure that they had time to **“devote themselves to prayer and minister the word.”** I know that one of the activities that I need to be about in the discharge of my duties on your behalf is to pray. Certainly Samuel understood the importance of intercessory prayer. Samuel certainly understood his responsibility. In addressing the Jewish people he said, **“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you**” This is an area of my life that I certainly want to be faithful in and an area that I want to grow in. But it certainly is not only for the leaders of a particular church fellowship to be involved in intercessory prayer for the people but the people that make up the church must also be involved in intercessory prayer for their leaders. If we are going to be a strong church and maturing church a fruitful church a powerful church then we must be a praying church. The leaders need to be praying for the people and the people need to be praying for their leaders.

Let us read **V. 25 “Brethren, pray for us.”** Who is the us? The us would have to be Paul and his companions **Silvanus (or Silas)** and **Timothy** who together had established the church at Thessalonica. These men were the Thessalonians teachers and spiritual leaders. And Paul is calling the Thessalonians to pray for them. We could very quickly gloss over this exhortation but that would be a serious mistake.

The verse starts with the word **“Brethren”** And this is in the emphatic position. It is the first time in the epistle that Paul places brethren in the emphatic position. Paul wants to make it very clear to the Thessalonians that it is because he considers them his brothers in Christ that he is exhorting them to pray for them.

You will remember that he tells them that he prays for them in **1 Thess. 1:2** where he said, **“We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers.”** Paul, Silas and Timothy made it their practice to continually pray for the Thessalonians. Now he turns the table and asks them to pray for them. They had prayed for the Thessalonians and now he is asking them to do the same for them.

The Thessalonians needed to pray for their spiritual leaders. **“Pray”** is in the present tense. The Thessalonians were to be continually praying for their spiritual leaders.

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Even though in this case they were presently separated. It is common for Paul to assure a particular congregation when he begins an epistle that he is praying for them and to close the epistle with a plea for them to pray for him. Paul and his companions needed their prayers.

Paul is not at all reluctant to ask for the prayers of others. Consider **Romans 15:30** “**Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.**” Paul was urging them to strive in their prayers for him. As I said Paul is not bashful about asking for people to pray for him. The same verb is translated “fighting” in **John 18:36**. That is where Jesus said to Pilate “**My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.**” What is Paul's essence saying? He is saying, “I want you to fight with me in your prayers.” **2 Cor. 10:4** tell us that “**The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.**” If we are going to be victorious in the spiritual arena of life then we must be praying and be prayed for.

In **Is. 64:7** the prophet rebuked Judah by saying, “**There is no one who calls on Thy name, who arouses himself to take hold of Thee.....**” He rebukes them for their lack of praying. Paul is seeking to arouse the Thessalonian church to pray and more specifically he is seeking to arouse them to pray for him and his companions.

I would like to use this opportunity to urge you to pray for your spiritual leaders at Valley Bible Church. Those who are in a position of oversight. That you would arouse yourself and take hold of God in prayer on the behalf of the spiritual leaders of this fellowship we need you.

Why get so worked up about this? Isn't God sovereign? Isn't he doing what He wants. Yes, this is true. But it does not change the fact that we are being called by the Lord to agonize in prayer. It does not change the fact that we are being called by the Lord to strive in prayer. And to do this on behalf of our spiritual leaders. Passionate, persistent prayer fits into God's sovereign plan. How does it fit in? I really cannot answer that but I know that it does. And therefore we cannot ever accept the status quo.

Even Jesus never accepted the status quo. He rebelled against the spiritual corruption of the Jews, he rebelled against the power of sin to cripple and to kill. He rebelled against the sinfulness that came upon Him at the cross and against the power to take his life, he even rebelled against the necessity for him to bear its penalty and he cried out, “**Lord let this cup pass from me yet not as I will but as thou wilt.**” SIN AND THE PERSUASIVE FALLENNESS THAT COMES FROM IT, THAT PERMEATES, THE SYSTEM, REPULSED JESUS AND HE PRAYED FOR AND SOUGHT IT'S DEFEAT AND NEVER DID HE RESIGN HIMSELF AGAINST SOME INEVITABLE END.

So we are called by Paul to pray for our spiritual leaders. In 1810 a man was born called Gardner Spring. He died in 1872 and he was the pastor of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City. He wrote about this need to pray for those in spiritual leadership and to pray passionately.

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As he writes he clearly is focusing on the preacher but hopefully what he writes will inspire us to pray for all those in spiritual leadership **“We entreat the churches to regard with a more deliberate and devote mind the great work itself to which their ministers are devoted. To explain the doctrines and enforce the duties of genuine Christianity. This is our duty. To defend the truth against all the subtlety and versatility of error. To sustain within their own minds that sense of God’s presence and of those moral sanctions which are revealed in His Word. And to experience that deep and tender impression of the things that are unseen and eternal that are necessary to give earnestness to their preaching as well as that consistent life and bearing that are necessary to give power to their preaching. And to do this in a way that shall adapt itself to different times, places, occasions, and characters and without being disheartened by difficulties, overwhelmed by enemies, and weary of the yoke which they have taken upon themselves is no ordinary work. If people are looking for rich sermons from their minister their prayers must supply him with the needed material. If they seek for faithful sermons their prayers must urge him by a full and uncompromising manifestation of the truth to commend himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. If God’s people are gong to expect powerful and successful sermons their prayers must make him a blessing to the souls of men. Would they have him to come to them in the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel of peace with a pounding heart, and a burning eye and a glowing tongue and with sermons bathed in tears and filled with prayer if so then their prayers must urge him to pray and their tears inspire his thrilling heart with the strong yearnings of Christian affection. It is in their own closets that the people of God most effectively challenge their beloved ministers to take heed of the ministry that they have received form the Lord Jesus.”** These are rich words. Then he went on to warn.

“Oh, it is at a fearful expense that ministers are ever allowed to enter the pulpit without being preceded, accompanied and followed by the earnest prayers of the church. It is no marvel that the pulpit is so powerless and ministers so often disheartened when there are so few to hold up their hands. The consequences of neglecting this duty is seen and felt in the spiritual declension of the churches. And it will be seen and felt in the everlasting perdition of men. While the consequence of regarding it would be the ingathering of multitudes into the kingdom of God and new glories to the Lamb that was slain.” It is a serious duty to pray your leaders.

What might be some of the things that you might pray for? We get a great amount of help from the apostle Paul himself in this regards.

We can pray for the safety of our spiritual leaders - In **2 Thess. 3:1** it says, **“Finally, brethren, pray for us”** and then in **V. 2** it says **“that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men.”** Pray this also for your spiritual leaders. Pray that they would **“would be delivered from perverse and evil men.”**

FIRST OF ALL FOR THEIR PHYSICAL DELIVERANCE - Spiritual leaders certainly have the potential of being attacked physically by perverse and evil men. Certainly Paul desired the prayers of the church that he might be protected against such attacks.

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We see him actually praying for this very thing in **Rom. 15:30, 31** where it says, **“Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, (31) that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea.”** Paul wrote this epistle on his third missionary journey from Corinth. He is on his way to Jerusalem with an offering from the gentile churches of Achaia and Macedonia. There is a tremendous amount of danger associated with this visit. This was made clear to us by the prophet Agabus in **Acts 21:10,11**. Paul knew this when he urged the brethren at Rome to strive with him in prayer for his deliverance. Can this happen today? Can spiritual leaders be in danger of physical attacks? In much of the world today this is not just a threat it is actually what is happening. It would be very unlikely in America today this in fact would take place but certainly it is a possibility. But there is more. When we pray for the deliverance of our spiritual leaders we are not just praying for their physical deliverance but their spiritual deliverance.

SPIRITUAL DELIVERANCE - Perverse and evil men are not simply found in the world but also in the church. Paul was frequently under attack by Christians. It is hard to believe that Christians would oppose Paul but it was not uncommon for Paul to have his critics. The Church at Rome is an example of this. The church there was divided. Some preached Christ sincerely, wanting to see people saved. Some preached Christ insincerely, wanting to make the situation more difficult for Paul. The latter group was using the Gospel to further their own selfish purposes. Perhaps they belonged to the “legalistic “wing of the church that opposed Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles and his emphasis on the grace of God as opposed to obedience to the Jewish Law. Paul writes in **Phil 1:15** referring to the church at Rome **“Some to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will, (16) the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; (17) the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. (18) What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice. (19) For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers** (through their what? Prayers). Paul wanted the prayers of the Philippians so that he might be delivered. But delivered from what? Look at **V. 20 “according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”** Paul was encouraging the Philippians to pray for him so that he might be delivered acting shamefully.

Paul was not asking to be physically delivered from the situation but spiritually delivered. I can share with you from personal experience that spiritual leaders will come under attack. If not a physical persecution unleashed by the world then certainly an attack upon them spiritually by certain members of the church.

Someone might ask, “Dale, have you experienced this kind of attack while seeking to do the God’s work here at Valley Bible?” And I would have to answer yes. Nearly 20 years ago there were a few people who charged me with being “unloving, manipulative, and unteachable.” And they went about seeking to convince others of my faults. That was a very difficult time in our church. Then again approximately six years ago the elders of Valley were accused of being liars.

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Again a very difficult time for our fellowship. Certainly I would not be totally honest to say that when these times come I would certainly covet your prayers be delivered from the situation itself. But more importantly I would hope that you pray for the spiritual leaders of this fellowship that when we encounter these various trials that we would be delivered from behaving shamefully. I would hope that you would pray that we would not spiritually falter.

Paul is giving to us at the end of this epistle three different exhortations as a postscript. The first of those exhortations is to **“pray for us.”** One of the prayers that could be prayed for your spiritual leaders is for their safety. **AND THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL HARM THAT THEY MAY BE INFLICTED UPON THEM BY PERVERSE AND EVIL MEN.**

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this epistle I shared with you the importance that the scriptures gives to spiritual leaders praying for the people. I shared with you the thinking of apostles on this matter and the feelings of Samuel.

And I have shared throughout this message the importance that the scriptures gives to the people praying for their spiritual leaders. The future effectiveness of this fellowship I believe very much lies in each of us fulfilling our God given responsibilities in prayer.

My prayer for each of us would be that we would join with Samuel in saying, **“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you**”