

Peaceful Living
2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

This is the last message that I will give from this epistle in our current series. Hopefully you remember the problems that Paul addressed in this letter. There was an ever-increasing persecution of the church in Thessalonica, so Paul wrote chapter one to encourage them. Chapter two was written in order to address the confusion and fear that had come into the church as a result of a fraudulent letter, claiming to be from Paul, asserting that they were in the day of the Lord. And finally in chapter three Paul was attempting to deal with the problem of certain believers who had in the midst of all this confusion taken the opportunity to stop working.

In responding to each of these problems Paul gives instruction. But he also offers a number of prayers.

Consider the problem of increasing persecution and Paul's response in chapter one. He gives them instruction in **VV. 1-10** but then in **V. 11** what do we see Paul doing? He is assuring them of his prayers. **"To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; (12) in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."**

Now consider their confusion about the Day of the Lord in chapter two. He gives them instruction in **VV. 1-15**, but then in **V. 16**, he does what? He prays, **"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, (17) comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word."**

Then in chapter three, *before* addressing the problem of idle believers he asks for the Thessalonians to pray for them. **V. 1** says, **"Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; (2) and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."** Having asked for prayer for himself and his companions we find Paul once again praying for the Thessalonians in **V. 5**, **"And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ."** Having prayed for them in this way Paul then gives instructions concerning the problem of idle believers in **VV. 6-15**, and once again we find him praying for the Thessalonians in **VV. 16-18**.

Let us read these verses, **"Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance, the Lord be with you all! (17) I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. (18) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."**

Paul knows that the Thessalonians cannot deal with these problems without truth. But he also knows that they in and of themselves are weak. He knows that they would not have any resources within themselves that would enable them to obey what the epistle instructs or rest in

what the epistle declares. Though we may be without personal resources in order to live righteous and godly lives, the Lord is not and we must be people of prayer. In this prayer we find three things that Paul prays for that we all need.

He prays for the Lord's peace

Let us read **V. 16**, “**Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!** He moves from a command, to not associate with those certain few believers who were not willing to work, to a prayer. And his prayer is for “peace.”

First of all we need to understand that Paul is praying for something that God has already made clear to us that he wants us to enjoy. It is God's will for us to enjoy peace. In **John 16:33** Jesus said, “**These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.**” This is what prayer is all about. It is not so much about us obtaining what we want, but rather prayer is about obtaining what the Lord wants for us. And one of the things he wants for us is peace.

What is peace? The dictionary defines peace as “freedom from mental disturbance.” When we are anxious we would not be at peace. When we are fearful we would not be at peace. When we are irritated we would not be at peace. We are only at peace when we are free from all mental disturbances.

People in the world at certain times can achieve a sense of peace. There will be times when they are not particularly disturbed by anything. They will have a sense of well being.

A drug addict may have peace as long as he can stay under the influence of the drugs.

A young person may have a sense of well being as long as they have their few close friends that they feel they can count on.

A businessman may feel a sense of calm when everything in their business is going well.

A mother and father may have a sense of peace when they see their children doing well.

But this is not the kind of peace that Paul is talking about here. The peace the world offers and the peace that Christ offers are different (John 14:27). The peace that Christ offers is not produced by good circumstances but by a right relationship with God. He is talking about a spiritual peace. A true deep down peace which confidently knows that all is well between the soul and God. This is the peace that we are talking about. It is a peace that has nothing to do with what people may say or not say. It has nothing to do with what people may do or not do. It has nothing to do with circumstances in my life whatsoever.

Paul in **V. 16** defines the peace he is talking about in several different ways:

The peace that he wants for us is divine. What does the verse say? **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace.”** The Lord of peace is the one who grants us the peace that Paul is praying for in **V. 16**. Notice the word “himself.” He could have simply said, “Now may the Lord of peace continually grant you peace” but he says the Lord *Himself* will do this. The peace that Paul wants for the Thessalonian believers, as well as ourselves, comes from God. Why is this so important? It is important because it means that we will enjoy the very same peace that He Himself enjoys.

Let me ask you a question. What kind of peace does the Lord of peace enjoy? God is never anxious. God is never fearful. God is never doubting. God never works at cross-purposes with Himself. He lives in perfect contentment.

Why? There is nothing in the entire universe that goes on that He does not know about. There is nothing that can withstand His intentions. There are no surprises to Him. There are no unknowns to Him. Even his wrath is clear, controlled, calm and confident. There is no threat to His immutable plan. He enjoys perfect and eternal harmony within Himself. He is therefore peace. He is the Lord of peace. What Paul wants is for the Lord of peace to give His kind of peace.

It is also important to know that this peace is not only from God, but is a gift from God. In the New American Standard Bible it says, **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant (DIDOMI) you peace.”** But the New International Version says, **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace.”** And the King James Version says, **“Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace.”** The peace that Paul is asking the Lord to give to the Thessalonians and the peace that we ourselves can also enjoy from the Lord is a gift. It is not something that has to be earned by us. It is rather something that the Lord wants to graciously bestow on us.

Do unsaved people have peace from God? The answer is no. Thomas Watson wrote, “Peace flows from sanctification, but they being unregenerate have nothing to do with peace, they may have a truce but no peace. God may forbear with the wicked for awhile and stop the roaring of his canon, but though there be a truce there is no peace. The wicked may have something that looks like peace but it is not. This is the devil’s peace. He rocks men in the cradle of security. He cries peace when men are on the precipice of hell. The seeming peace a sinner has, is not from the knowledge of his happiness, but from the ignorance of his danger.” It is the peace of a delusion. True peace is the child of saving grace. And the one who does not have saving grace does not have true peace. Whatever peace that Satan may convince him that he has is the peace of his ignorance. Because he does not understand his true condition or he would have no peace.

Not only is the peace Paul is praying for divine and a gift, but it is always available. Look again at the passage. **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace.”** There is not a time when the Lord’s peace is not available to us.

If it is continually available, then it must be available in all circumstances. And of course this is so. Look again at the verse. **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant (give) you peace in every circumstance.”** No matter what circumstance you or I are facing, we know that the Lord is with us. What did Jesus promise His disciples in **Matthew 28**? **“Lo, I am with**

you always even to the end of the age.” He is with us now not to do us ill, but good. What do the Scriptures teach us? **“All things are worked together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose.”**

Because of these promises, and because I can trust God, I can have the same peace He enjoys because I know that none of his purposes for my life are going to be thwarted, and I trust Him.

He prays for the Lord’s strength

Look again at **V. 16**, **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!** Certainly we know that He is with us because we know that the Lord is omnipresent. He is everywhere all the time. But He is not talking about omnipresence.

In **Matthew 1:22-23** it says, **“Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying (23) ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’”** Someone might say but He has always been with us. But He had never been with us like this before. He had never been incarnate.

The Lord continues to be with us, not in a physical body but in a spiritual presence very much prepared to supply for us whatever we need in order to do His will. What did Jesus say in **Matthew 28:19-20?** **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; (Oh, how can we do this?) and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** The Lord Jesus continues to supply for us all that we need through the indwelling Spirit to accomplish all that He has called us to do.

Paul prays then for the Lord’s peace to be ours, He prays for the Lord to be with us which we need to understand not in the sense of His omnipresence but rather in the sense of His supply in order to accomplish whatever purposes He may have for our lives.

He prays for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

He wanted the Thessalonians as well as ourselves to enjoy grace. What is grace? God’s goodness given to those who don’t deserve it. What is the means by which God’s goodness is channeled to us? It is through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who has supplied us with grace. It begins with saving grace. The grace to pass from death to life. The grace to pass from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of life (**Eph. 2:8-9**). After this we receive enabling grace.

Grace for endurance - **2 Corinthians 12:9**, **“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”**

Grace for service - **1 Timothy 1:12-14**, **“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has**

strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, putting me into service; (13) even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; (14) and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant.”

Grace for sacrificial generosity - 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, “Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, (2) that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. (3) For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, (4) begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.”

Whatever might be found in us that is good is there because of God’s grace who have showered His goodness upon us when we were unable to do so ourselves.

CONCLUSION

We are called to obedience. As we are in the pursuit of this holy purpose let us be reminded that though it takes all of me, whatever good that results, is all of Him.