

Background

In this series we are looking at the _____ of the Apostle Paul. So far, we have examined Paul's first two prayers on the Damascus Road during and after his dramatic salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ. We have also looked at the two prayers that are found in the _____ epistle, arguably the earliest of Paul's known writings. Today we return to the First Thessalonian epistle, again one of Paul's earliest epistles, in which we find five distinct prayers. Last time we examined the _____ of these prayers found in I Thessalonians 1:2-3 and now we turn to the _____ prayer in Chapter 2. But first, let's remind ourselves of the background of the epistle so that we can better understand the _____.



The distinction of this epistle is that it is _____ very early among the writings of the great missionary apostle Paul. Along with the Galatian epistle, this was Paul's earliest writing, and it is significant because of the _____ of the epistle, which is the _____ of the Saints and the _____ of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The city of Thessalonica was a large and prosperous _____. It was one of the most important cities in all Macedonia. Its early name "_____" was, of course, derived from the hot springs nearby. Thessalonica was inside of Mount Olympus, the original venue for the Olympic Games. The name "Thessalonica" was given to the city in honor of the half-sister of _____ the Great who bore the same name.

_____ main issues are dealt with throughout this epistle. First, Paul's apostolic _____ and personal integrity were being attacked by people who were trying to undermine the work of the great apostle. These detractors maintained that Paul was not really concerned about their welfare and that what he had done was only connected to a profit motive. The second main issue centers around the Second Coming of Christ. In I Thessalonians chapter four where Paul discusses in depth the _____ (harpazo ἀρπάζω or "catching away of the saints"), he gives a clear and joyous answer to the question of exactly what happens to those who die in the flesh believing on the Lord. Here Paul emphatically states that the bodies of the dead in Christ would be caught up first and gloriously _____, reuniting with their spiritual nature which Christ brings with Him from heaven. Then the believers who are alive and remain shall also be caught up in the clouds of glory to be transformed forever more. And so, Paul teaches, we "shall ever be with the _____."

Quick Overview

This _____ prayer occurs at the end of a large, personal, and autobiographical section (I Thessalonians 1:4-2:12) describing Paul's ministry among the Thessalonians and his love and care for them. After finishing all of these wonderful memories, Paul breaks out in a spontaneous prayer of thankful remembrance for the _____ of God and its work among these dear people. He also makes mention of those who opposed the Gospel, both in Thessalonica and in Judea, and refers to the ultimate fate of those who reject the _____ and oppose others hearing it. Here is how we will organize our thoughts around this remarkable prayer. This prayer begins with a thankful remembrance of the _____ of the Word of God by the Thessalonian believers; then follows the _____ of that reception by the Thessalonians, namely persecution from the unsaved world of Jews and Gentiles; and concludes with the _____ of the Word of God and the retribution which will follow as a result. That this comes as a prayer—"we also thank God—" might at first come to us as a surprise, but it does us well to remember that it is far better to take those who have done us wrong to the Throne of Grace and plead for the _____ of God, than to take matters into our own hands and not only harm ourselves but those for whom we should be praying. Paul could recall people who were crippled or killed by those who opposed the spread of the Gospel. But rather than getting angry and seeking revenge, Paul goes to God thanking Him for the victories won and reminding God of the actions of the _____ and God's promised retribution. In the back of his mind, Paul must have also realized that he once served as a persecutor of believers and was reminded of just how _____ and righteous God can be—thus balancing grace and truth.

With this background in mind, let's take a closer look at Paul's second prayer in First Thessalonians 2:13-16: "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word

of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, ¹⁶ forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16.

A THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE OF THE RECEPTION OF THE WORD OF GOD: ¹³ “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” I Thessalonians 2:13 The words, “For this reason...” harken back to the argument of the second chapter prior to our passage of the morning (vv.13-16). And so, in order to get a clear understanding of the _____, we need to remind ourselves of what Paul says beginning in chapter 2. The earlier part of the second chapter is among the most intimate autobiographical sketches in the entire corpus of Paul’s writings. Paul is defending himself against the charge that some of the Jews had leveled against him that he was merely taking advantage of the Thessalonians for _____ reasons. I think it would do us good to quote the first 12 verses and simply summarize the context that leads to this prayer.

“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.” (1 Thessalonians 2:1–2, NKJV) The apostle Paul had come to Thessalonica boldly and with the burden for the people in spite of the fact that he and Silas had been shamefully _____ (and that Paul as a Roman citizen could have pressed his rights and made great trouble for the leaders of Philippi) and had been quietly expelled from Philippi. He had not allowed the maltreatment at the hands of the Roman officials to make him _____ or deflect him from doing what was clearly the will of God.

“For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.” (1 Thessalonians 2:3–4, NKJV) Paul’s preaching was not pandering to the crowd. The Gospel was the last thing the unregenerate man desires to hear since it renders him incapable of pleasing God in any way. The Gospel entrusted to the apostle Paul by the Lord Jesus Christ teaches that all humanity has _____ and is _____ without hope of saving itself. But God, in His great grace and mercy, voluntarily and out of sheer agape love took our place on the cross and our sins upon Himself. God poured forth His fierce wrath against our sins on His own Son Who became a _____ offering for us and shed His precious blood that God would be free to extend His gracious merciful kindness to us since our sin debt was fully and completely _____. Christ was buried to prove the reality of His death and was raised from the dead on the third day to prove that God had accepted and approved of Christ’s sacrifice for us. Boasting is totally excluded, and pride is utterly cast down. This is the Gospel that was entrusted to the apostle Paul and to you and to me.

“For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 2:5–6, NKJV) Paul, next, reminded the Thessalonians that he did not come as a politician to win votes or that he might _____ from them. He did not come to seek their adulation, nor did he demand support, even though financial _____ was rightfully due him as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

“But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” (1 Thessalonians 2:7–8, NKJV) Paul uses an analogy here that is very striking in his relationship to the Thessalonians. He likens his relationship to the Thessalonian believers as of a nursing _____ toward her own child. He did not come to get, but to give. He was gentle, cherishing them as a mother cherishes her very own _____. And like any good mother, he was willing to give his life for his children. His was not a “hit and run” ministry. He invested heart and soul to these dear people.

“For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2:9, NKJV) Although he was in Thessalonica for less than a month, he worked very hard to impart to them everything they would need as a church after his departure. This epistle, and the next one he will send, testify to the _____ of his teaching ministry among them. All along the way, Paul gave himself exhaustively to proclaiming the truth. Surely,

this is the model for modern pastors to labor diligently making sure that the doctrines of the Bible are plainly _____ and clearly presented. The ministry is no place for the lazy or the leech-although sadly this is exactly the reputation the modern ministry has acquired. Would that we would exhaust ourselves in the service of our Lord and of His sheep.

“You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;” (1 Thessalonians 2:10, NKJV) The apostle Paul reminds the Thessalonian believers of what they had seen with their own eyes. They had observed the apostle Paul and his team living separated lives and treating everyone fairly and _____ (literally “having nothing to get hold of”-my old football coach told us to tuck our jerseys in, keep our heads down, and keep our feet moving so that our opponent would have nothing to grab a _____ on and bring us down.) This is the sense of the word blamelessly.

“As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12, NKJV) To conclude our review of the chapter so far, Paul changes the metaphor from a nursing mother to a nurturing _____. A good father comes alongside his children, not as a tyrant or a bully, but as a _____, comforter, and challenger of his children. He wants his kids to live up to the family name and to function in such a way as to bring honor to their family by what they do or say. And so, we understand the chapter up to this point, and this is all the _____ for the phrase, “for this reason.”

Now let's come to the prayer itself: ¹³ “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word Of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

First, note with me the _____ thankfulness to God rendered on the part of Paul in changed lives among the Thessalonians and for the power that actually changed them! Of course, Paul had a part in the work of God which we've already detailed in verses 1-12, but he makes clear that what really made the _____ is the Word of God. The word for “without ceasing” (ἀδιαλείπτως adialeiptos) is the adverbial form of an old friend, a compound word we learned in our last study on the prayers of Paul. “Without ceasing” is (ἀδιαλείπτως adialeiptos) which is a compound word “a”=negative or not, “dia”=through, and “leiptos”=to leave; literally, something that “will never go through you” or “leave you.” This refers to the kind of memories we have of a precious mother, grandmother, spouse, or child which are so deeply burned into our soul that we will never _____ them. It is used with the same significance as the adjective, “not of what is not interrupted, but of that which is constantly recurring.” W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), 94.

Second, the powerful _____ received: “because when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively _____ in you who believe.” I would like to call your attention to the manner of the reception. In the King James translation of this verse, no distinction is made between the words “received” and “welcomed” - both are translated “received.” But the New King James recognizes the subtlety between these two words as it translates the first as “received” and the second as “welcomed.” This is a great translation. The first word “received” (παραλαμβάνω paralambanoo) is made up of the word “para” meaning “alongside” and “lambanoo” meaning to “receive.” Without getting too deeply in the weeds, we can say that it carries the idea that the Thessalonians _____ and _____ the message imparted to them by the one who came to help them. At its root, it involves the personal _____ of truth. They not only heard the Word of God, but they heeded the men of God who faithfully and fully gave it to them.

The second word is here translated “welcomed,” “you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” Here the Greek word is (δέχομαι dechomai) and it speaks of something that has been _____ and found fully acceptable, thus welcomed! It speaks of the open hearts and _____ minds of those who really wanted the truth, and when they heard it, and they knew it to be true, they fully and completely embraced it! The apostle Paul is clear that his message was not “the word of men” but in truth the very Word of the living God. And we are told that the mark of this message is that it “also effectively works in you who believe.” The word “effectively works” is one Greek word (ἐνεργέω energeoo) from which we get our English word “_____.” This is truth that is both dynamic and productive. It is dynamic in that it is powerfully alive. Greek philosophy and Jewish legalism left their adherents _____, powerless, and longing for both a dynamic that worked in reality and an ethic that could regulate the affairs of humanity in a world of conflict. Christianity, as taught in the Bible, filled that void.

And the message was _____ because it _____ the character of Christ, first in the apostle, and then in his hearers, those who believe! Salvation, in the first tense, which is _____ by grace through faith, sets us free from the _____ of sin. Christ took our sin away, bore its penalty, and now we all no longer face condemnation because of sin. Salvation, in the second tense, which is _____, sets us free from the _____ of sin so we no longer have to live in its dominion. And thank God, salvation in its third tense, _____, in which we will be set free from the _____ of sin for all of eternity, is so sure that the Holy Spirit speaks of it in the book of Romans chapter 8 in the past tense as if it already has occurred! This is the working of the Word of God.

THE RESULTS OF THE RECEPTION OF THE WORD OF GOD IN THESSALONICA AND IN JUDEA: "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans," (New King James Version, First Thessalonians 2:14). It has been said that _____ is the sincerest form of flattery. In this case, imitation is the work of God.

First, they were imitators in their designation. "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans," (New King James Version, First Thessalonians 2:14). Once the Thessalonians willingly and approvingly believed the message of the Word of God, they became "imitators." The word here is interesting. It is μιμητής (mimetes). This is the word from which we get our English words mime, _____, and even mimeograph (for those who are old enough to remember those early copying machines). What he is saying here is significant. Paul is saying that through their acceptance of the Gospel and their placement in Christ, these Thessalonian believers became the called-out ones just like the early church in Jerusalem. Paul would later remind them that there is no Jew or Gentile, no bond or free, no educated or barbarian in Christ. The ground at the _____ of the cross is level for all, and all who freely accept the dynamic Word of God concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel of the grace of God, are part of the glorious _____ of faith! And this applies no matter where they are located geographically or chronologically in this _____ of Grace. We, like the Thessalonians, and the church at Jerusalem, are all a part of the grand community of faith through the Gospel of the grace of God.

Second, they were imitators in their destination. Look again at Scripture: "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans," (New King James Version, First Thessalonians 2:14). The reason for their grand standing before God is the fact that they have come to faith _____. Though separated by ethnicity, culture, and geography, the church at Thessalonica was as much in Christ as the original Jerusalem church.

Third, they were imitators in their devastation. "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans," (New King James Version, First Thessalonians 2:14). Sadly, these Thessalonian believers entered into another fellowship—the fellowship of _____—because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When someone tells you that you should follow Christ because He "has a wonderful plan for your life" and you can simply coast to heaven on "flowery beds of _____" while "you name and claim material things" that you covet, you can know that this is not the Gospel that either Paul or the Bible teaches. The word "suffered" is πάσχω (paschoo) which is the same word used of the sufferings of Christ in Acts 1:3, "to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3, NKJV) Aside from Christ's spiritual sufferings (which we will never fully understand), He suffered _____, humiliation, shame, and insult. Do we really expect if we follow Him closely that we will escape such treatment?

THE REJECTERS OF THE WORD OF GOD AND THE GOD OF THE WORD AND HIS RETRIBUTION: "For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost." (I Thessalonians 2:14b-16, NKJV) The great apostle now _____ his prayer by remarking about the universality of this rejection under fallen mankind in all conditions and times, reminding the Thessalonians of the ultimate sin of the rejecters of the message of Christ, and ending with the utmost fate of those who reject God's Word and retard God's work.

First, Paul remarks about the universality of this rejection of God's Word under fallen mankind in all conditions and times. "For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men..." The pagans of Greece (Thessalonica) and the people of Judah may seem very different-as different as different can be-but they are _____ in one thing: they refused to accept God's Word (both the incarnate Word [Jesus] and the Inspired Word [Scripture]). What was their crime? They made the Thessalonians suffer! They made the believing Jews suffer. They killed the prophets who rebuked their sins. They _____, betrayed, and murdered the Prince of Life (the Lord Jesus Christ) and they were persecuting those who brought the life-changing Gospel to the world!

Second, Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of the ultimate aims of the rejecters of the message of Christ. "...they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved..." The word for "please" is "areskoo" (ἀρέσκω) which at its root means "to render service that is befitting or _____." These are people who were dead set against doing anything that might please God or be worthy of Him. While denying the existence of God they nevertheless decry and denounce Him. Before CS Lewis became a Christian, he _____ the existence of God while at the same time was bitter against God for not answering his prayers! The best example of this attitude is found in the words of Richard Dawkins, the new atheist who absolutely _____ the existence of God and at the same moment says this about God:

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it, a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynist, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." Quote from *THE GOD DELUSION*. It strikes me as rather odd that someone would have such a strong opinion about someone he claims does not exist.

Because *they will not render to God proper service, they will not treat men, who are made in the image of God, with proper respect.* For as the prayer puts it, they are: "contrary to all men." The word "contrary" here means "over against" or "adversarial against." Since man has become "enlightened" and has thrown off the garb of faith or service to God, human life made in His image has become cheap. The womb has become a killing field for the _____ mills of the sex-crazed world. Babies even up to the very moment of birth are its fodder. The elderly, once revered by our society, are now warehoused and viewed as a waste of resources. Minorities are targets of indiscriminate violence. Women are nothing more than objects of lust and gratification. And teenagers are killing themselves in record numbers. All of this is a direct result of the rejection of God!

But the adversaries of the truth are not content with rejecting the truth of God alone, but rather they are forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved. "Forbidding" here is a very strong word which is the opposite of setting free. It means "to bind," "to hinder," or "to restrain." This is not just opposition but a persistent, active obstruction. These enemies of God did everything in their power to keep the Gentiles from hearing the Gospel which would set them free. This is the ultimate aim!

Now Paul ends his prayer by *reminding the Thessalonians before God of the ultimate fate of those who reject God's Word and retard God's work so that they will not be discouraged.* Our text concludes with these words: "so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost." The words "to fill up the measure of their sins" is a Hebrew idiom for a _____ or a measure that is not quite full but approaching its end. God will be gracious and allow them to continue, all the time extending a hand of mercy even to His enemies. But there comes a limit to God's grace and patience and when the cup is completely full, He will make his enemies drink it to the bitter dregs. The word for "wrath" here is a slow burning anger that is come on them to the end. Yet even in wrath, God remembers mercy. Even now there is time to awaken and turn to the mercy and grace of our loving God.