

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 “Prayer and the Advancement of the Gospel” [**](#)

Main Idea: In Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 1:10-11, we learn that prayer holds a vital key to the advancement of the gospel of Christ.

I. Paul's Thankfulness for the Church (3-4)

- A. They had a Growing Faith.
- B. They had an Abounding Love.
- C. They had a Model Reputation.
- D. They exhibited Endurance in the face of Persecution.

II. Paul's Prayer for the Church (11-12)

- A. He prayed with Persistence.
- B. He prayed with Purpose.
 - 1. For God's Working IN the church
 - 2. For God's Working THROUGH the church

Footnote: What Paul asked the Church to pray for him (3:1-2)

- A. That God would advance the Message (1)
- B. That God would protect the Messenger (2)

The church moves ahead on its knees. I don't know where I first heard that perspective, but it's true. If the church is to make progress in the fulfillment of its mission, if the church is to succeed in making Christ known to lost people and then in making disciples of those who profess faith in Him, if the church is to *move ahead* it will do so *on its knees*.

Listen carefully to the following words which, although written nearly 100 years ago, speak accurately of our times. Ponder the convicting questions Edward McKendree Bounds posed in his classic *Purpose in Prayer*, “Are we concerned about the coldness of the church? Do we grieve over the lack of conversions? Does our soul go out to God in midnight cries for the outpouring of His Spirit?”

“If not, part of the blame lies at our door. If we do our part, God will do His. Around us is a world lost in sin, above us is a God willing and able to save; it is ours to build the bridge that links heaven and earth, and prayer is the mighty instrument that does the work.” (123)

Of Richard Baxter it was said that "he stained his study walls with praying breath." George Whitefield, the great 18th century evangelist, is said to have prayed once, "O Lord, give me souls or take my soul." (Bounds, 122) Charles Haddon Spurgeon once remarked, "If any minister can be satisfied without conversions, he shall have no conversions." (114)

Dr. J. Wilber Chapman observed, "Revivals are born in prayer." When Wesley prayed, England was revived. When Knox prayed, Scotland was refreshed. (Bounds, 117)

Did you realize that prayer holds a vital key to the advancement of the gospel of Christ? Yes, we're called to preach the gospel, but prayer gives the gospel wings to fly.

Our text this evening is 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12. In this passage the apostle Paul shows us an important connection between prayer and the advancement of the gospel.

Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, wrote this letter to the church at Thessalonica. The letter of 2 Thessalonians was written shortly after 1 Thessalonians, perhaps six months or so in the year A.D. 51 or 52, and both letters are two of Paul's earliest writings.

This was a special church to Paul, a fact made clear at the outset of the letter...

I. Paul's Thankfulness for the Church (3-4)

Verses 3-4 "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring."

Paul said he felt an obligation, a duty, a compulsion to thank God for the believers at Thessalonica. Why? He highlights 4 reasons...

A. They had a Growing Faith.

See Acts 17 – Paul started the church at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. Do you recall his strategy? He preached in the Jewish synagogue for 3 consecutive sabbaths.

Q: What was his message to them? 17:2-3 He preached Christ!

Q: What was the effect of his ministry? 17:4 Many were saved! But not everyone was impressed. Verse 5 refers to "some bad characters" [the KJV uses the descriptive "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort"].

Q: What did the opposition say about the Christian missionaries? V 6 "These that have turned the world upside down."

Wow! What a testimony! May we never underestimate the power of the gospel! The gates of hell shall not prevail against it! The gospel turns the world upside down! That means it will save people. It will also ruffle a few feathers.

So it did in Thessalonica. Paul was forced to leave due to the hostility of the Jewish antagonists (10). The young converts were forced to weather their storm without the aid of their spiritual father Paul.

But God was with them. That being the case, they not only stood. They flourished!

Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians for four reasons. First, they had a growing faith. They had a big view of God, and it got bigger every day!

Is your faith growing? Is there evidence to prove it?

B. They had an Abounding Love.

Verses 3 “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because... the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.”

These people loved each other. Love is to be the trademark for disciples of Christ. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,” said Jesus.

But notice the word “increasing” [in the KJV the words "exceedingly" and "aboundeth"]. Faith and love are not static concepts. There's always room for growth and expansion and development.

C. They had a Model Reputation.

Verse 4 “Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith...” The KJV says, “We ourselves *glory* in you in the churches of God.” Paul could point his finger at the Thessalonian church and say, “There's the way it ought to be. There's a model church.” Not because they were problem free, for there is no such thing. Paul says they were a model church in one particular area...

D. They exhibited Endurance in the face of Persecution.

Verse 4b—“...We boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.” Evidently the hostility didn't let up after Paul left town. Yet that didn't diminish the enthusiasm of those young believers. They exhibited endurance. By God’s grace, they hung in though their faith was tested over and over again by opponents of the gospel.

Endurance—that's kind of a rare trait these days. We experience resistance and tend to conclude, “I must be doing something *wrong*.” The Thessalonians understood that the resistance they felt was to be expected—because Paul told them ahead of time it would be so.

For instance in Acts 14:21-22 we're told, “They [Paul and Barnabas] preached the good news in that city [Derbe] and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch , strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God ,’ they said.”

I'm not sure we do enough *warning* with young believers, not to mention prospective believers. “It's going to be *hard*,” Paul told them. “There will be *many hardships*. But it will be worth it, for we're going to enter the kingdom of God .”

Paul used the hope of the kingdom of God to encourage the Thessalonians as well. He reminds them the kingdom is why they should hang in there, no matter how fierce the persecution was becoming, in verses 5-10:

“All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the **kingdom of God** , for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.”

The church in Thessalonica sounds like a pretty good church then, doesn't it? They had a growing faith, an abounding love, a model reputation, and they exhibited endurance in the face of persecution.

The question is, how do you pray for a church like that? Let's take a look...

II. Paul's Prayer for the Church (11-12)

Verses 11-12 “With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so 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.”

Let's break apart the apostle's prayer. Notice 2 characteristics...

A. He prayed with Persistence.

Verse 11—“We constantly pray for you.” It's always a good thing to practice what you preach! Remember what Paul commanded the Thessalonians about prayer in his first letter? 1 Thes. 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." That's what he did. He prayed *pantote*, always, at all times. He prayed with persistence.

Remember the parable Jesus told about the widow in Luke 18:1-8?

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them **that they should always pray and not give up**. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. **And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?** I tell you, he will see that they get justice, **and quickly** [since God is not like the unjust judge!]. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Listen again to E. M. Bounds, from *Purpose in Prayer*:

One of Satan’s wiliest tricks is to destroy the best by the good. Business and other duties are good, but we are so filled with these that they crowd out and destroy the best. Prayer holds the citadel for God, and if Satan can by any means weaken prayer he is a gainer so far, and when prayer is dead the citadel is taken. We must keep prayer as the faithful sentinel keeps guard, with sleepless vigilance. We must not keep it half-starved and feeble as a baby, but we must keep it in giant strength. Our prayer-chamber should have our freshest strength, our calmest time, its hours unfettered, without obtrusion, without haste. Private place and plenty of time are the life of

prayer. To kneel upon our knees three times a day and pray and give thanks before God as we did aforetime, is the very heart and soul of religion, and makes men, like Daniel, of 'an excellent spirit,' (Dan. 5:12), 'greatly beloved' (9:23).[\[2\]](#)

Pau I prayed with persistence. What's more...

B. He prayed with Purpose.

Verse 11 "...we constantly pray for you *that...*" Biblical prayer must be marked by purpose. We're not praying biblically when we offer God "pat" formulas or canned recitations. We're not praying biblically when we're scraping the milky way with impressive sounding, religious jargon.

Paul prayed with purpose. And so must we.

Let's notice the specific requests Paul laid out before the Lord...

1. For God's Working IN the church

Verse 11 "THAT our God may count you worthy of His [KJV 'this'] calling..." What does that mean? The "calling of God" is a prominent theme with Paul. Usually, when Paul speaks of the "calling of God," he has in mind that moment when God calls men out of darkness into His glorious light (Rom 8:30 "Whom He did predestinate them He also called"). God's call is an effective call.

Then what does Paul mean when he prays that God would count the Thessalonians "worthy" of His calling? For starters, let's reinforce the biblical truth that NOONE is worthy of the God's call. We are all UNWORTHY. Furthermore, Paul's not implying that they might fall away from the status of called people (Morris, 210).

Simply put, Paul's prayer is this. "Father, help my friends in Thessalonica to live up to Your calling. They haven't arrived yet. Please continue to do Your mighty work IN them."

This work would involve two things, according to the next two phrases in Paul's prayer. Notice verse 11 again, "...we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, *and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.*" Notice the two phrases, the two things he is asking God to accomplish in the church at Thessalonica...

and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours [KJV "fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness"] -- God places desires in the hearts of His people, desires for His good work to be accomplished. But we lack the means to bring those desires about. God alone can fulfill those purposes. So Paul prayed and asked him to do so. As well as this...

and every act prompted by your faith [KJV "the work of faith with power"] -- God's people show they are God's people by actions prompted by their belief in their Saving God. But as with our desires, so our actions. Unless God provides the wherewithal, our actions will fall short. So again Pau I prays. He prays for God's work to be accomplished *IN* the church at Thessalonica.

We need to remember this. God's work isn't over when He saves us. Sanctification is a process, and Pau I prayed about that process for his friends.

But the church's spiritual growth isn't an *end*, but a *means* to something, as indicated by Paul's next request...

2. For God's Working *THROUGH* the church

Verse 12 "We pray this so 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."

God has a great work He desires to do *IN* us. He also has a great work He wants to accomplish *THROUGH* us. Did you catch it? Paul says He desires to "glorify the name of Christ in us."

In our day, "names" have little significance usually. We use names merely to distinguish one person from another. But in Bible times, the name was much more than that. The name summed up the whole character of a person.

When Paul prayed that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in the Thessalonians, here's what he was asking. "Father, I pray that my friends will live such lives of virtue that glory will be given to the One responsible for that virtue."

To glorify means "to make weighty." Did you realize that we can add weight to the reputation of Christ? Yes, and we can also take away weight, by the way we live. Our lives can either cause other people to be impressed with Christ, or distracted from Christ.

How can our lives truly reflect Christ? Only by grace, says Paul at the end of verse 12, "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Ponder the fact that Paul had *purpose* when he prayed. He asked God to do a great work both *IN* and *THROUGH* the Thessalonians. The persecution was still happening, but Paul didn't go into a defensive mode. The gospel must still advance. And the gospel can still advance, even when the enemies of the church are breathing fire against it. Victorious power is still available for the asking.

Application:

Paul prayed for his friends. They needed his prayers. He was convinced that his prayers could have a vital impact on the advance of the gospel in Thessalonica. But I want you to see something else, a footnote. That is, Paul needed prayer too. And he asked the Thessalonian Christians for it.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 "Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith."

Footnote: What Paul asked the Church to pray for him (3:1-2)

A. That God would advance the Message (1)

Paul was a great apostle. But the reason he was great and the reason he had such a great ministry was *NOT* because of sheer natural ability. It was because he availed himself to supernatural ability.

He needed prayer. He asked for prayer. Not for personal comfort either. He asked for prayer that God would advance the message of the gospel.

[share illustration about D. L. Moody told in E. M. Bounds, *Purpose...*, pp. 117-9]

B. That God would protect the Messenger (2)

Paul's not asking for general safety in his traveling and preaching. He has in mind some enemies of the cross. The Thessalonians knew who they were. Perhaps they were the hostile Jewish leaders who ran Paul out of Thessalonica.

Paul knew he was in a spiritual battle. He needed protection. Again, his concern was not so much for himself, as for the spread of the gospel. God uses messengers to make Christ known. Those messengers need divine help and protection.

The Bottom Line: Prayer holds a vital key to the advancement of the gospel of Christ.

That being the case, we're going to spend some time now praying as a church, praying for the advancement of the gospel...

...in our community

...and around the world

[1] This message has been adapted from an earlier message preached at WBC 10/3/93 PM in a series on prayer.

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[2] E. M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer*, p. 87.