



A RIGHT HEART FOR GOD'S FOLLOWERS

Week #15; Oct. 4, 2026, 11AM

Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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Review:

- Last time in our study in **1 Thessalonians** (two weeks ago because of The Lord's Supper last week), we examined **Chapter 3:6-8**.
- That lesson was called '**Your Faith Matters to Others.**' The points of that lesson were drawn from Timothy's return to Paul after Timothy had gone back to Thessalonica.
- Timothy had given a good report to Paul about how the new Thessalonian believers were holding up under trial and persecution.
- Paul was overjoyed to hear this! Paul had been SO concerned. He had been SO afraid that these new believers might not endure in their new-found faith.
- And so, our lesson last time was focused on four ways OUR faith has a role to play in the faith of others:
 - **A true faith brings encouragement** - - the report that these new believers were standing firm in their salvation and convictions – it was THIS good news that convinced Paul their faith was genuine. And Paul was greatly encouraged.
 - **A strong faith endures hardship** - - this is the point of **James 1:2-4**. A strong faith is not demonstrated in the absence of trouble and difficulty, but rather, a strong faith is demonstrated in the MIDDLE of trouble and adversity.
 - **A report of faith provides comfort** - - you may not realize it, but your faithfulness under trial gives encouragement and comfort to others. It's because you are an example. You are showing others "It CAN be done!" (and) you are showing them HOW to do it.
 - **A firm faith inspires joy** - - when we center our joy on the spiritual welfare of others, when we are driven to make a difference for Jesus Christ, we have joy in the fruit of our labor. It's why Paul admitted, "Life is worth living!" His purpose for being on this earth was affirmed.

NOTE: This week, we close out **1 Thessalonians Chapter 3** with **vss. 9-13**. Let's **read** them together (**READ**):

- Here we see Paul's personal example. Here, he shows us what a **right heart for God's followers** looks like.
- Here we see what a **right heart for God's followers** acts like, and we see what is most important to a heart like that.

IMPORTANT QUESTION: Have you ever said you have a heart for someone in the faith, that you care about them, that you love them, or that you are concerned for them? If you have (and I certainly hope you have) – then this lesson is for you.

But - it's not just for you – it's also for me. I say these things all the time, and **I really mean them!** I care for all of you in ways I cannot describe. My days – and sometimes my weeks – feel 'wrecked' when....

- I know some of you are struggling with the burdens of life and the trials of faith.
- (when) I sense that some of you are battling with the convicting truths of Scripture - especially when I sense the devil has an upper hand, and he is keeping you from growing in the ways you need to be growing.
- (when) I see you trying *desperately* to endure despite the challenges of finances, health, bad relationships, and various spiritual oppressions.

These things – and others like them - matter to me! I say my days are 'wrecked' because I grieve, I lament, and I care. God has given me a love for all of you that I cannot comprehend.

I'm not doing any of this because I don't know what else to do with myself. I've never lacked for ideas and inspirations. I sense the Lord's calling on my life with Solid Bread Community, and so this lesson is very much for me as well.

NOTE: I want to move into this lesson by calling out a very important overarching point in response to that question I just asked. If you truly CARE for someone who is in the faith, you will PRAY for them - - and you will pray for them a certain way. Paul brings this out in **vs. 10**.

You will pray for their spiritual growth. You will pray for their stronger faith, for their deeper love, and for their ability to live holy lives. That's what Paul outlines here in **vss. 9-13**, and so let's look at HOW our prayers show **we truly have a right heart for God's followers:**

A. FIRST, it's a heart that rejoices over spiritual growth (Cf. vs. 9)

NOTE: Here Paul says, "*How can we thank God enough for you.*"

1. Paul's joy wasn't just that the Thessalonians were surviving. It was that they were thriving.

- Paul was thrilled that these new believers were standing strong in their walk with the Lord despite their many persecutions and pressures.
- His rhetorical question, "*How can we thank God enough*" was his way of saying, "*I cannot! I don't have the words to express my gratitude.*"
- Some translations say, "*How can I render back to God in return(?)*" Here's his point: words could not adequately express to God the thanks which filled Paul's heart.
- His joy was overflowing every time he remembered these saints before God. And so, Paul is overwhelmed. He expresses this to God in his prayers.
- In his joy, Paul feels a burden to pay back to God something he feels he owes. Paul is clearly showing that we, as Christians, owe our joyful thanksgiving and praise to God for what He is doing - - and what He alone has done.

- This is a positive way of looking at this. Paul feels the obligation to repay something back to God, but he knows he is unable to do that. God did it all.
- Paul knows he could not reward God back equivalently, and so he expresses his joy, his praise, his thanksgiving.
- This shows up in how he prays for these new believers - - he **rejoices over their spiritual growth**.

2. There's a key takeaway here: one of the greatest joys any Christian can have is seeing another believer that they care about grow spiritually.

- Paul's ministry was never about numbers, buildings, programs, or recognition. His joy was seeing people becoming stronger in Christ.
- On a more personal level, we should never engage with others based on what we can get out of that relationship for ourselves.
- Our lives ought to be consumed with 'service.' And **you are serving your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ**. You may not always think that way, but it's true!
- I encourage you to imagine or picture Jesus standing just behind every person you are talking to, praying for, or trying to help.
- This is not some sort of 'hokey visualization exercise.' It's a discipline of your mind. It's a state of your heart.
- I encourage you to picture Jesus sitting in the tough committee meeting with you, standing in the room when you get bad news, and watching you when you interact with your fellow believers – including those you have a hard time with.
- In everything, in ALL of that, He wants YOU to find your greatest joy in serving HIM!
- And when you properly serve Jesus Christ (your Lord, your Master, your Savior) - - you will care MOST about those things that He cares most about.
- You will mature and grow in the joy that you feel when you see another believer that you care about grow spiritually. If God has given you a personal role in bringing any of that about - - **it should thrill you!**
- It should give your Spirit-controlled heart indescribable joy. It should naturally prompt your response, as it did with Paul, *"How can I thank God enough???"*

3. Let me ask you a few questions to help you discern if you have a heart that properly rejoices over others' spiritual growth:

- Who are you thanking God for **right now** because of **their** spiritual growth?
 - Don't force an answer. If you have to force an answer – then it's not real.
- (Here's another): Are you rejoicing when other believers are maturing – even if you are not getting credit for it?
 - This is a big one. You may have had a role to play, but perhaps you are not playing the bigger role right now **as you see it**.

- **Remember**, God is the one keeping track here. Your job is not always to be the planter, waterer, and harvester. Sometimes, your role is just one of those things. Be happy being PART of the process and not ALL of it.
- (And here's one more question): How are you evaluating the body of believers you are associated with?
 - You should be most joyful when that body is producing people who are growing and maturing in their faith.
 - You should be most happy when their spiritual progress is evident and they are bringing joy to others.
 - You should not find your joy in bigger numbers, bigger finances and projects, or bigger publicity. You should find your greatest joy in seeing people grow spiritually.

B. SECOND, you should have a heart that longs for greater spiritual depth (Cf. vs. 10)

NOTE: Here Paul says, *“Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith.”*

1. This point is closely related to the last one, but it is also different, and we see that from the larger context here.

- Paul already knew the faith of these new believers was genuine. **Chapter 3:6–8** makes that clear.
 - But Paul wasn't satisfied with **“good enough.”**
 - He wanted to see their faith **“perfected”** their faith. He wanted it to be complete.
 - He wanted to strengthen it. He wanted to supply what was lacking – in their faith.
- This is an important distinction that we all need to be aware of, that we all need to be striving toward.
 - **Spiritual maturity doesn't mean we have already arrived.** Even a faithful Christian who is walking the narrow path has areas where their faith needs strengthening.
 - That's why Paul regularly prayed for these new believers' deeper understanding, stronger faith, greater perseverance, and continued growth.
 - A mature Christian isn't someone who has nothing left to learn; that will never happen in this life and on this earth.
 - Rather, a mature Christian is someone who realizes there is always more room – more places and more ways - **to grow.**
 - Paul's example shows us that **a right heart for God's followers** is a heart that longs for their greater spiritual depth.

NOTE: (Personal comment here): I've been thrilled to see a group of 6 or so ladies that are part of Solid Bread Community's Cheyenne series start to come together and form close bonds.

- They didn't know each other before we started teaching the series, "A Biblical View of the End Times" up there this past November.
- But now they've met. Now they're forming close relationships. Now they are regularly getting together, supporting each other, praying with each other, and finding more ways to grow in their Christian walk.
- God is using each of them FOR each other. They are showing they want to develop their spiritual depth and their fellowship – and I have great joy in seeing that. Pray for them!

C. THIRD, we ought to have a heart that wants God's will more than our own plans (Cf. vs. 11).

NOTE: Paul writes in **vs. 11**, "*Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*"

1. This is an important point that is easy to overlook.

- Paul desperately wanted to return to Thessalonica (we saw that back in **vss. 1-5**), but he simply could not make that happen.
- His ministry to these Thessalonian believers was facing opposition, and he was one man. He couldn't be two places at once.
- So, what did he do? He had **a right heart for God's followers**, and so he prayed.
 - He prayed, "*God, clear our way. God, direct our way.*"
 - This is a tremendous lesson for each of us, particularly when God is using us to impact the lives of others.
 - Paul had a desire. He had a plan. He had a destination and focus. He had a burden for a specific group of people. But yet...
 - He still submitted the outcome to God. He still yielded his own wishes to God's sovereignty.

2. There's a powerful lesson here: our good desires need God's right direction.

- Sometimes God says, "*Go. Move forward.*" But – sometimes God says, "*Wait, 'Be patient and trust me,' or 'Not yet' - - or 'Not **that** way, but **this** way.*"
 - A heart that wants God's will more than our own plans is a tough attribute to develop.
 - It is a constant exercise of faith, and it means we must allow God to determine the timing and the path.
 - We naturally want to be in control of our lives. Sometimes, we want to be in control of others' lives. But a mature heart in Christ is one that waits and PRAYS for God's will – not our own.

D. FOURTH, a right heart for God's followers is a heart that wants love to be expressed and to overflow (Cf. vs. 12).

NOTE: Paul says here that his prayer is that "...the Lord make you to increase and overflow in love for each other, and for everyone else..."

1. I want you to notice Paul's emphasis in this verse.

- He doesn't simply pray, "*Lord, make them love each other.*" They already did!
 - Rather, he prays that their love would "*increase and abound.*"
 - In other words, he says: "*Lord, having love for one another is not good enough. I want that love to find NEW ways to show up. I want it to overflow.*"
 - The Bible says in **John 13:35**, "*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*"
 - **True** Christians should be marked by demonstrating a love that exceeds the world's standards. Love among believers should be constant, serving, and even sacrificial.
 - **This is a rare love, and it gets noticed when it's real.** The world notices, and the world is attracted to this kind of love.

2. I have two things to mention about this kind of love, and Paul brings both things out in vs. 12.

- **#1**, this kind of Christian love begins within the body of Christ. It is love (as Paul specifies) "*for each other.*"
 - One of the most obvious displays of **having a right heart for God's followers** is demonstrating a love toward one another.
 - What does this love look like? I could give several lessons on this, but here are **three** qualifications of this kind of love:
 - ✓ **First**, it overlooks a wrong. **Proverbs 10:12** says, "*Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers all wrongs.*"
 - ✓ This kind of love sets a huge contrast with the world's standards. The world shows a bitter attitude—which want to pick a fight. When the world is wronged, it wants conflict.
 - ✓ But with genuine Christian love, it is a love that conceals and forgives offenses rather than fighting back or broadcasting them to others.
 - ✓ **Second**, this kind of love forgives and is patient. As **1 Cor. Ch. 13** makes clear, this kind of love does not keep records.
 - ✓ This kind of love is also patient. It holds up, it endures, and it keeps 'plugging away.'
 - ✓ It forgives others just as God forgive us in Christ. It moves on and it extends mercy and grace where that is needed.
 - ✓ **Third**, this kind of love is unconditional. This love is not based on any sort of merit or qualification. It should not be based on our estimation of someone who is easy to love - - or not!

- ✓ Instead, this kind of love mirrors God's choice to act in **our** best interests. Our unworthiness did not keep God from first loving us, and so other's "unworthiness" should not factor in either.
- **#2**, this kind of Christian love – while it begins within the body of Christ – does not stop there. It is also love (as Paul further specifies in **vs. 12**) *"for everyone else."*
 - A healthy body of believers isn't supposed to be some sort of spiritual club where Christians just love Christians and ignore everyone else.
 - Paul's larger point about *"abounding in overflowing love"* is this: "Don't forget about the Gospel."
 - One of the greatest pieces of evidence for a healthy body of believers is it is positively and eternally impacting others outside of its immediate confines.
 - The Gospel – when it is properly embraced - produces a love that cannot be contained. It produces a love that needs to find new territory to show itself, and so it moves outwards.
 - It starts with a healthy and vibrant love for one another **IN** the faith, but that love will naturally demonstrate itself by 'going outside the fence'
 - We see this very principle in action in **Acts 2:42**, and then in **2:47**. Together, these passages read:

"They (the NT early church), devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.....And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

- From **vs. 42 in Acts Ch. 2**, through the end of that chapter, we see the NT church acting like a true body of believers, focusing on the basics of their fellowship and faith, and demonstrating their love *"for each other."*
- And there is an outcome of **BEING** this and **DOING** this. Others were impacted. God added to their number *"those who were being saved."*
- When Christians truly **ACT** like Christians, the Gospel produces a love that naturally moves outward.
- We don't need talent shows, bouncy castles and kids events, gun raffles, MMA fights, car shows, etc. (all things that various churches have tried, BTW) to reach out to others.
- We just need to focus on **responsible** study, **deep** fellowship, and **proper** love for one another. As we grow that way in Christ, and as we then **genuinely** grow in our *"love for one another,"* God will add *"those who are being saved."*

E. THEN FIFTH (and lastly) a right heart for God's followers is a heart that wants to pray for holiness in light of Jesus Christ's return (Cf. vs. 13).

NOTE: Paul concludes **Ch. 3** by saying, “*that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones.*”

1. I have said it before: Paul is continually focused on the eternal perspective.

- And so, we see a progression here in how Paul prays for these Thessalonian believers: For their **Faith → Love → Holiness → Jesus Christ's Return**.
 - Paul is not interested in merely making the Thessalonians feel better.
 - He says he wants God to “*strengthen your hearts*” so that they will be “*blameless and holy*” as they anticipate Jesus Christ's return.
 - As we've learned already, this body of new believers in Thessalonica were constantly living in the hope and expectancy of Jesus Christ's imminent return.
 - BTW, this is a clear emphasis on the pre-Tribulation Rapture. These believers were not living in expectation of the start of the Tribulation.
 - They were not living in the expectation of enduring God's wrath. They were living in the hope and joy of Jesus Christ's return FOR them.

2. There is a practical implication here for you and I: our expectation of Christ's return should directly affect our choices and the way we live today.

- If we think and live as the world thinks and lives, we will look and react as the world looks and reacts.
- But if we think and live as Christians ought to think and live, then we will be different. If we recognize our citizenship is in heaven and not on earth, then we will invest into our eternal future and not our temporary future.
- If we diligently seek our rewards in heaven and lay aside our pursuit of rewards on earth, this future-perspective produces ‘holiness’ in us.

NOTE: Winding down here. Having a **right heart for God's followers** should show up in how we pray for them. Paul gives us a template here for what that looks like:

- We ought to pray that their faith be strengthened and their love be increased – not just amongst each other, but then to others outside as well.
- We ought to pray that the Lord will establish or strengthen their hearts, that He will make them holy and set apart, and that they will be prompted to conduct themselves in a manner that considers Christ's return.
- Here's another way of looking at all this: there is a practical thrust here. **Our prayers for others reveal what we believe they really need.** If we have the wrong priorities for ourselves, we will have the wrong priorities for others.
- There is nothing wrong with praying for their physical or financial needs, or any other personal challenges they may be dealing with. We need to keep doing that.
- But - - Paul's point is quite straightforward: if we love them and if we want what is most important for them in the bigger picture, then that will show up in how we pray for them.

CONCLUSION: Paul's prayer for these new Thessalonian believers is NOT that they would have easier circumstances, greater prosperity, or fewer problems.

He prays that **God would strengthen what is happening inside them:** their faith, their love, their holiness—and their right conduct and choices in light of Jesus Christ's soon return.

NEXT TIME: Paul instructs these new believers to be **sanctified**. That's not easy. We will learn what this process of 'sanctification' is all about and what it looks like.



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Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God's Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don't pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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