

Prayer

When I call on You, Lord God, hear what I say and deal carefully with me, for I am bruised. I offer no excuse for the wrong I have done, for I know my humanity and the tempter's voice; but I am not ashamed to come to You and seek Your help. Be my friend now when I need You most, and by Your Spirit, bring me through my time of trial and lead me safely on; give me the courage to pursue Your will, O Lord: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Food

Pray that governments will regulate and companies will manage food production in a way that reflects godliness, care, and a respect for the future of life and real human need

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the example set to the young by sports personalities*
- *Pray for people whose governments do not represent them*
- *Give thanks to God for your security and peace*

Meditation

Great and Mighty Lord, You are more than I can ever be:

- You are like a library compared to my book;
- You are like great wisdom compared to my knowledge;
- You are like a forest compared to my sapling;
- You are like everything compared to my possessions;
- You are like a roaring wind compared to my breath;
- You are like all history compared to my brief life;
- You are like a computer network compared to my peripheral;
- You are like an encyclopaedia compared to the article I write;
- You are like a landscape compared to my snapshot;
- You are like perfection compared to my sinfulness;

Make me whole, Gracious Lord, in Your good time, I pray.

Bible Study - 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

¹¹ Now may He who is our God and Father and our Lord Jesus, guide our pathway back to you; ¹² and may the Lord make you grow and overflow with love for one another and for all, just as we do for you, ¹³ so that your hearts may be established as blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Review

This reading is one of those powerful blessings found throughout Paul's writings, which appear to indicate that the letter is at an end. Paul could have concluded his thoughts here and intended to sign off, but then returned to the letter later on, perhaps the next day, with further thoughts about what he should say. We will follow this train of thought tomorrow as we continue with 1 Thessalonians 4, which is a powerful chapter containing some important

teaching. Today, however, our passage is a specific blessing for the Thessalonian church, and in places, it contains words rather like a 'benediction' (in verses 11 and 13 especially). Up to this point, Paul's letter has indicated his desire to return to Thessalonica, and the passage reflects this simply (3:11) before continuing with the blessings, some of which contain teaching not found in this form elsewhere in Paul's writing.

The first unusual feature is what the passage says about God and Jesus. We are used to speaking about 'God the Father' and 'our Lord Jesus' (3:11) as one and the same; but the fact that this letter was written only 20 years after Jesus' death means it is one of the first written documents that says openly that Jesus is God (the Gospels were written down a little while later). Today, we look back on the life and death of Jesus knowing that the church has established this truth, but we should not forget how extraordinary it was for people of those days to believe this. Moreover, it is also a powerful testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church that this belief should be expressed in this way so quickly after Jesus' death (3:11). The declaration 'Jesus is God' remains fundamental to Christian faith to this day, and we should never forget its importance and significance.

In the centre of this passage, Paul writes about love as being the evidence of faith in the life of the Christian community. He believed it was natural for the church to show overflowing love 'for one another and for all' (3:12). It is well known that Paul frequently spoke about love in his letters and emphasised its importance, for example, this forms the climax of his first letter to the Corinthians (see chapter 13). It is also true that although love must always come 'from the heart', Paul always spoke of love not merely as a personal attitude, but as something that must surely affect how Christians behave. Surely, none of us can know that we are loved except through what people do and how they behave towards us, but it is astonishing how often we talk about love in the life of the church without being willing to do those things that demonstrate the true love of God. Forgiveness and 'going the extra mile' are examples of this love that are taught by Jesus (Matt 6:12f. Matt 5:41) and encouraged by Paul (Col 3:13, 1 Thess 4:1,10), but they still come hard to many of us today.

What Paul says in this passage of Scripture is that by doing all we can to put love into practice, we 'establish' our hearts as 'blameless in holiness' (3:13). This sounds rather deep, but in reality it is straightforward. By doing loving deeds as taught by Scripture (such as caring, forgiving, going the extra mile etc.), we 'prove' to ourselves, to others and to God that the faith and love in our hearts is real. Moreover, this is something that is truly 'holy'; God's nature is love, so by doing deeds of love, we both demonstrate our faith in Him and make Him known in the world. This is what the last verse of our passage says, no more, no less, and it adds that this proof of our faith stands at the End, when Jesus our Lord, who has revealed these truths to us by His Spirit, comes again in glory with all His saints (3:13)!

This small passage is an important reminder to us of our essential faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and the importance of demonstrating our faith and our discipleship through loving deeds.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Share testimony in your group about how you have been guided by God in the course of your everyday life.
2. Do people who believe in God readily believe that Jesus is God, today? If not, what might be the barriers to this?
3. How can we put the love of God into action today in a way that demonstrates our faith and does not compromise it?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

For me, the simplicity of this text is powerful. It takes a truth in which I deeply believe, that Jesus is God, and does two things. It declares this with clear and challenging words, and it also illustrates it with suggestions about how I should live out this truth. I have my difficulties with the church today as many people do. However, if I do not show the challenging, caring and supremely generous love of God in all things, then I stand condemned before the judgement of God's Word, and I must remember this.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Ask yourself what aspect of the life of the church causes you great difficulty and makes it hard for you to be forgiving and generous. These are precisely the challenges of love that the Lord is bringing you.*
- *Pray for the church today, because there is much division and stress amongst people who find it very hard to love each other. Pray for any such people who you know.*

Final Prayer

Give me, Lord a heart that is open to Your guidance and Your will. May I be prepared to go wherever you may call, with the courage to stand against any evil, using the gifts You have given me. Help me to serve others under all circumstances, so that God may be glorified in all I do. Thanks be to God. AMEN