May the Lord Jesus be with you today and always.

“*Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved*.”

1 Corinthians 10:6

Paul here is referring to all the trouble the nation of Israel got themselves into. We see over and over again how they rebelled against God and had to pay the consequences. The thing is, they were not some pagan nation; they were the chosen people of God. When they sinned, they faced punishment.

As Christians, we know that our sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ. But Paul is reminding us that sin still has consequences. We need to learn from the experiences of Israel that being chosen people of God does not give us license to rebel against Him; we are not free from the effects of committing sin.

Learn from Israel. Live a holy life that is pleasing to God. Not only will we avoid the unpleasantness of chastisement, but we will have a much closer relationship with God through our Saviour Jesus Christ. And that is far more pleasant than any sin.

In Christ’s love

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7-11-21

1 Thessalonians 5:25-28

Last week we looked closely at the prayer in verse 23: “*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” All these good things that Paul is praying for depend on God for their fulfillment. Christians are called to be cooperative in the process and do the things that will help us reach these spiritual goals; but the ultimate change in us comes from the work of God.

We also looked at verse 24 which contains a promise: “*Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass*.” This promise also drives home that God is the one who brings about the finished work of all His plan and He does it through Jesus Christ. The faithfulness of God is so very important to us. Without faithfulness, we would not know for sure if God would stand behind His promises. Scripture also tells us that God is unchanging. So, if He is unchanging, His faithfulness will always remain intact and we never have to worry that He will lose His faithfulness.

One of the Scriptures that shows that God does not change is Malachi 3:6, “*For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed*.” This verse is comforting and terrifying at the same time. God is telling Israel that they had rebelled against Him so badly that they should be completely wiped out. But God doesn’t change, so He remains faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham. The nation of Israel only exists today because of God’s faithfulness.

Now for us, God remains faithful to us through the new covenant in Jesus Christ. This new covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah in 31:33, *“[T]his is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people*.” This covenant came about in Jesus Christ, but the people of Israel rejected their Messiah, so God went into the highways and byways and brought in the Gentiles. Now God is faithful to write His law on our hearts through the process of sanctification.

All of this is to bring God glory, so we must understand that although we might do good things and work toward holiness, God brings about the changes and our abilities so He gets the credit; He gets the glory.

After these reassurances, Paul makes a request: “*Brethren, pray for us*.” Here we see something amazing about prayer. The church in Thessalonica had been started by Paul and it really wasn’t very old. It was full of new Christians. Yet here was Paul, asking them to pray for him and the others in his team. It shows how powerful prayer is; a seasoned veteran of spreading the Gospel, an apostle, seeks the prayers of beginner Christians.

Don’t ever think your prayers don’t matter or are unimportant. It doesn’t matter if you feel you’re not good at it. God wants to hear your prayers and they do make a difference. Remember that at Christ’s death, the veil of the holy of holies was torn in two. Jesus removed that which blocked our direct access to God. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God will hear your prayer; that is part of the work Jesus did on the cross.

Scripture encourages us to pray; we have constant and continual access to God. He made that access so we could use it. If you are ashamed to come before Him, tell Him so. Confess your sin and it is gone. If you are grateful, tell Him so. It is always good to give thanks to the One who gives all good things. Lay your worries at His feet, He can deal with them, He is strong.

Paul is asking the whole church to pray for them. This is intercessory prayer. It is absolutely good and right to pray for ourselves; but we must pray on behalf of others too. Our goal is to become more like Jesus; keep in mind what He is doing at this very moment: He is interceding for us. He is speaking to the Father on our behalf. The ministry of intersession is important enough to occupy Jesus; it is certainly important enough to occupy us.

I know that you have prayed for me in these last difficult months. Those prayers have made a huge difference because God acts on the prayers of the faithful. I ask you to continue to intercede for me as pastor. No human-being can properly fulfill this calling without constant guidance from the Father. No pastor can withstand the assaults of satan unless protected by Divinity. Your prayers strengthen and protect me through Jesus Christ.

Next, Paul tells the church, “*Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss*.” Firstly, Paul is looking for unity in the church. Notice the word “*all*”. It is very common for people in groups to form what we call “cliques”. A small group, within a group, that stick to themselves and won’t let others into their little circle. This tendency must be consciencely avoided in a church body. This kind of thing always leads to division. Naturally, some people in a congregation are going to hit it off and develop a good friendship and there is nothing wrong with that. Just don’t let that friendship interfere with fellowship with the rest of the body of Christ.

Let’s look at the idea of an “*holy kiss*”. The kiss we have to understand as a cultural practice. We know that in some cultures today it is simply a matter of greeting. Two men might kiss each other on the cheek and it means nothing more than a handshake would mean to us. A proper greeting to a newly introduced lady might be a kiss on the hand. It is simply a matter of respect. The kiss Paul refers to is along these lines; a greeting, a display of friendship or fellowship; even if between a man and a woman. This is why he adds “*holy*”. Everyone was to use this greeting as simply a brotherly or sisterly gesture and not let it be any more than that.

If fact, in some of the early churches, this idea of a holy kiss became part of the worship service. It became part of communion.

Well, Christian men and women are still fallen human-beings. You can imagine, in spite of best intentions, what this led to. One of the early church fathers was Clement of Alexandria; that is Alexandria, Egypt. He lived from about AD 150 to 215. He complained of those who “make the churches resound” with their kissing. He also wrote “the shameless use of a kiss … occasions foul suspicions and evil reports”.\* It wasn’t long before the churches had to make restrictions; just men kissing men and women kissing women.

We do not need to reinstate kissing in the worship service due to this verse. We are doing just fine expressing fellowship and affection the way we do. A handshake is sufficient. Hugging is fine, just keep it a holy hug.

Paul continues with a very strong statement: “*I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.*” When Paul says “*I adjure you by the Lord*”, he is actually putting the recipients under oath to God. He is very serious about having this letter read to all the members of the church in Thessalonica.

\*From Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Leon Morris

Paul wanted to make sure that everyone in the church received the message he had for them. He didn’t want it to stop with just the leadership of the church. We don’t really know why Paul put it so forcefully, there may have been some problem in the leadership or maybe he just wanted the whole church to know how much he loved and cared for them.

But one thing is for certain, Paul knew his calling to be an apostle was from God. The things he wrote in this letter were from the Holy Spirit through him. He was, in fact, writing Scripture. Because he was writing the word of God, it was important for the people to hear it.

Paul was a human-being and he was able to make mistakes. I think we are shown this in Acts 15 when he and Barnabas had such an argument over John Mark that they parted company. But when he was writing his letters to the churches that we now have in our Bible, there were no mistakes. These words are from the Holy Spirit and are entirely trustworthy.

The reading of Scripture during worship service was brought over to church from the Synagogue. In the Synagogue the readings were strictly from the Old Testament. But in the church services, they could read from the Old Testament and they could read any copies of letters they had from the apostles. These letters and the Gospel accounts were read, passed around, and copied. Of course, they eventually became our Bible.

Think about how blessed we are today, especially in this country, to have such access to the Bible; to the word of God. These letters were read in the early church because people didn’t have their own copies. Many of them couldn’t even read, so these letters had to be read out loud. It is still important for us to hear the word of God. The Holy Spirit will bless us as we listen; He will write these things on our hearts. Think of Revelation 1:3, “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy*”. While that was written specifically for Revelation, I’m sure it applies to all of God’s word. We are blessed in reading and we are blessed in hearing.

For the third time in three verses Paul calls the Thessalonian church “*brethren*”. He recognizes that all the Christian men and women are children of God, just as he is. He may have been called as an apostle, but each person in the body of Christ has a calling from God. And each one is important. A church body won’t work without all the parts.

Finally, Paul ends as he usually does, with a prayer for grace, “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you*.” Let’s consider grace. The definition we give is “unmerited favor”. This is a fine definition; God shows us favor when we really don’t deserve it.

Part of truly understanding the Gospel is coming to the realization that we really don’t deserve anything good from God. He is completely holy; He will not tolerate leaving sin unpunished. If He left sin unpunished, it would go against His very being. We talked earlier about God being unchanging; if God let sin go unpunished, He would have changed; it’s not going to happen.

In our natural condition, we are completely opposed to God; evil reigns in our hearts. Even though He gave us life, we rebel against Him and choose death. We deserve hell.

But God is merciful, and by His grace He has made a way for us to everlasting life; even at His own great expense, the life of His only begotten Son, Jesus. This is favor we don’t deserve. If we accept Jesus as Saviour, our sins are forgiven because they were punished in Jesus. God’s justice is satisfied and we can receive mercy.

This is the grace we usually think of; the grace that brought us salvation. But grace continues for the child of God. If we stop and think about it, how could we possibly hope for anything more from God once He has given us salvation? But that is just the beginning of the grace He pours out on His children. Even when we are in Christ, we still don’t deserve any good thing from God, yet He continues with favor that we don’t deserve.

It is only through Jesus that we can perform a righteous act that is acceptable to God. He seals us with the Holy Spirit, who lives with us throughout our lives to guide us and make us like Jesus. By His grace we can resist sin; we can rebuke satan in Jesus’ name. He helps us here on earth; He stores up treasures for us in heaven. By His grace we grow in the Spirit and are properly shaped for placement in the heavenly temple.

Paul loved the church in Thessalonica and he complemented the people on their Christian walk; but he encouraged them to increase. This church body can increase, not simply in numbers, but in spiritual growth. Pray for the Spirit to reign stronger in each life, pray for each other, pray for this body of Christ, and pray for the body of Christ throughout the world. Jesus said He would build His church, but somehow, in His grace, He uses the prayers of His people.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we lift up Your church throughout the world. We realize by faith, that Your church is not in danger of disappearing. You said that You would build Your church; You are all-powerful God and You will not fail. Satan and hell come against Your people, but You told us that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church You build.

Thank You Jesus for the privilege of being used in the building of Your church. By Your grace working in us we can help build Your Kingdom by bringing people into Your church. We are Your servants Lord, use us as You will.

For this church too we pray. Lead us in the ways of righteousness. May Your Spirit open our hearts to Your great love. Help us to love You and be in unity with the brothers and sisters in Christ.

In Jesus’ name we pray these things

Amen