

The Very God of Peace

Reading: 1st Thessalonians 5:23 - 24

The first Epistle to the Thessalonians ends with this incredibly comforting prayer of the Apostle for these first century believers.

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it”.

This is actually the second of two “wish prayers” that the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle records within the letter. The first thing for us to note here brethren and sisters is that we are dealing with the same God. Our Heavenly Father does not change; He is that same yesterday, and today and forever, for with Him is no variableness neither shadow of turning.

Indeed the scriptures declare for it is our Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Let each of us note brethren that “it is his good pleasure”, so it’s not just any old whimsical desire, but something that would provide our Father with the greatest pleasure.

Here in this prayer brethren and sisters powerfully portrayed for us, is the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father towards those who are beloved in Christ. Notice carefully how our Heavenly Father is described for us here as the “very God of peace”. These 1st century brethren and sisters from Thessalonica had already endured and were continuing to endure much tribulation, so this title of our Heavenly Father here would have been of supreme comfort to them. Yet there is much, much more to this title of our Heavenly Father.

Here we have one of the key elements to these New Testament prayers in that within the prayer the character of our Heavenly Father is emphasised, usually with special attention to one of his attributes. In this case “peace”, which is one of his communicable attributes in that He desires to duplicate this peace both with us individually and collectively as an ecclesia. Indeed until the whole earth is at peace.

This is clear from the context in which this prayer is found in that this final section of the epistle is all about dwelling together to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The Master gave a similar exhortation in:

In John Chapter 14 and at verse 27 we read

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”.

“Peace”, my beloved Brethren and Sisters is speaking here not only then of a divine attribute of Almighty God, but it is also a description of his work in us through Christ. For as we read elsewhere “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

The exhortation here is this present peace we have with our Heavenly Father in Christ is not just an end in its self, rather there is an eternal purpose to it, which can be clearly seen from the rest of this prayer.

This peace has to be achieved in three distinct relationships. Firstly and foundationally with our Heavenly Father in Christ and we have each come here today to remember that work of redemption.

Indeed **in Hebrews Chapter 13 and verses 20 – 21**

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”.

Secondly as a result of this we can have peace in ourselves, which will allow us to thirdly have peace with one another in our ecclesial relationships. The order for these three aspects of the outworking of this peace is important brethren and sisters. For any attempt to subvert this order will not result in peace.

Some five times the number of grace, do we find this New Testament title the “God of peace”. In three of the occasions it is speaking as it does here of our redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ in that final day, when Yahweh shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly.

Whereas in the other two references it is speaking of the peace, which must be manifested amongst our selves. For if one of our Heavenly Father’s attributes is peace, then we too, if we are to be called his children need to be peacemakers. Did not our Lord and Master say “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God”.

This peace is to be all encompassing in our own and ecclesial lives, regardless of the circumstantial turmoil of day to day life. It is through this understanding of peace that we can indeed have joy and be able to rejoice in all cases and events.

So then, this peace then is not just something granted to us individually, but it also to become an attribute of our characters manifested in our ecclesia’s. Please note that this peace is not the spirit of compromise, which seeks only freedom from any strife. Rather this is a peace, which comes from being united in purpose and action around a mutual understanding of the truth.

The prayer continues that the very God of peace “sanctify you wholly”. Now the word “sanctify” means to both set apart from something and to consecrate to something. So there are both positive and negative aspects to this work of God, through Christ. In the Greek this word “sanctify” and indeed also the word “preserved” later in the verse are in the *optative* mood. *Optative* just means that this request is the strong wish of the Apostle for these first century brethren and sisters.

This process of sanctification, which our Heavenly Father has begun in each of our lives brethren and sisters, will result if we allow the Father to complete his work in us through Christ. In each of us being made partakers of the divine nature and escaping the corruption that is in this world through lust. Thus as we become more like the Master, we will have greater peace in our relationships with our God, with ones self and with each other.

Now in Philippians chapter four we are given an example of ecclesial strife generated by two sisters. The Eternal Spirit through the Apostle exhorts the brethren and sisters present to resolve the issue. Rather they were to concentrate on those things in the truth, which generate this peace of God, which passeth all understanding.

Philippians Chapter 4 and verse 9

“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you”.

This exhortation is actually picking up how the Master himself learned from his Father and how the Apostle learned from our Lord. Thus the Apostle exhorts these Philippian brethren and sisters to imitate him, as he has imitated the Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact first Thessalonians chapter two, which is our reading for the day is a beautiful expansion of this verse in Philippians four. In this second chapter the Apostle is defending himself from his Jewish detractors who sought to argue that He worked in ecclesial life in the spirit of the flesh for gain, as is clear in the first six verses.

Rather in verses seven to twelve we have the Apostle and his ministry team spiritually parenting these young brethren and sisters in the truth.

Turn back to chapter 2 and verses 7 – 12

“But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how

holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory”.

This is how we each are to behave within ecclesial life brethren and sisters. Look carefully at the way the Spirit portrays the gentle character of the Apostle and the brethren with him. Living embodiments of the gospel of God. Paul not only loved these brethren whom he had known for only a short time, but he willingly gave himself to them, as a living sacrifice.

Is part of our problem brethren and sisters in not being able to manifest such love consistently, because we know about one another’s warts and all? We need to learn to take the long view of one another that we are all divine works in progress and see what we shall be in the mercy of our God. Rather than what we currently are.

Here then the Apostle models for us the very character of not only our Lord and Master, but also of our Heavenly Father in his care for these babes in the truth.

We likewise need to develop this same paternal spirit of endearing love and responsibility with regards to one another. Because in doing so, we shall be like our Heavenly Father in pursuing peace. If our Heavenly Father could unite Jew and Gentile in the first century, then surely brethren it is not without his ability and power to unite even us who have nowhere near as great cultural distance between us.

Ephesians Chapter 2 and verses 14 - 18

“For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father”.

So the application of peace in our ecclesial lives is part of our participation in the atoning work of our Master. Please understand me here brethren, the sacrifice of the Master cannot be added too by us, it is completely efficacious. But we show it to be efficacious in our lives, when we individually and collectively seek and ensue peace.

In Hebrews Chapter 12 and at verses 14 - 15 we have this salutary warning:

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled”.

Take note that the word “follow” in the Greek here is a present imperative command, meaning it is an ongoing necessity for us to pursue this peace. Through both allowing and actively working with our Heavenly Father in Christ. To bring about the complete sanctification of our whole Spirit, soul and body in our belief of the truth.

This work of sanctifying us through the word of life having its effect; through the providential care of the angels and our interactions one with another is a work then of our Heavenly Father as a peacemaker. Restoring the breach which sin made into the creation, due to Adam’s failure and our compounding of that failure through our own sin ever since.

Thus in the bread and wine brethren and sisters before us upon the table we see the great price which was paid to bring to pass this peace, even the precious blood of the Master. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another, for to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

In Colossians Chapter 3 and verses 10 – 15

“And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of

God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful”.

We see then brethren and sisters the consistency of the message for us to be made wholly at peace with our God; we are to become renewed in our thinking and character. As peace we are informed elsewhere is a fruit of the spirit and they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Indeed Ephesians speaks of each one of us having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, that our walk would indeed be worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

No wonder then this prayer speaks of us being sanctified “wholly”. This word in the Greek only occurs here and is a qualitative term. It speaks of completeness in every aspect hence the three-part rendering of “spirit and soul and body”. The word is speaking of a process or journey, which will take some time, but one which has a definite end. Therefore brethren and sisters let us be confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Now this three part rendering in verse twenty three in the AV of our “whole spirit and soul and body”, at first seems odd, but actually corresponds to those three relationships of peace we have already highlighted. Namely with our Heavenly Father and our Master, with our own selves and finally with one another in Christ and indeed all men. These three parts then spirit and soul and body speak of our complete being, nothing is left out and everything is to be brought into the obedience of Christ.

All is to be “preserved blameless”, now as we said earlier the word preserved here is also in the *optative* mood indicating the strong desire and wish of the Apostle for these brethren at Thessalonica.

Here was what Paul desired the Father to achieve in their lives; indeed the Apostle knew and recognised that only God could perform this. Brethren and sisters is this the kind of prayer, we pray one for another and desire in one another’s lives?

This word “preserved” carries the idea of keeping guard over and taking great care of. As the Thessalonian brethren and sisters were undergoing great tribulation it is entirely apt that the Apostle prays, such a prayer.

Yet note that he does not leave it, just in the here and now, as it were. Rather the Apostle extends the two wishes of his prayer until the coming of our Lord and Master. Thus he is not only praying that these brethren and sisters be preserved through their current trials. But rather he desires that our Heavenly Father would take care of them until the end. Thus there is a purpose for their preservation beyond the immediate.

We too brethren and sisters need to learn to root our prayers not just in the moment for one another’s immediate needs both physical and spiritual. But also importantly in the eternal realities of the coming kingdom and the return of our Lord.

The Apostle then prays not only that these brethren whom he loved were preserved until the coming day of the Lord, but also that their preservation might be “blameless” unto that day. The word “blameless” here carries the idea of these brethren and sisters being without anything against them, when they stand at the judgement seat of Christ. This equally should be our prayer one for another brethren and sisters.

When we examine prayers such as this one in 1st Thessalonians five, we find that our Heavenly Father is neither uncaring nor remote from us brethren and sisters. Despite what our current circumstances may indicate to the contrary at times. Rather we find our God, acting as a Father unto us exhorting, comforting and charging each one of us as his children. So that we might walk worthy of Yahweh, who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory?

In 2nd Thessalonians Chapter 3 and at verse 16

“Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all”.

Now there are two other things in these verses to note concerning our Heavenly Father. Firstly the expression “very God”. In the Greek the word “very” here means Himself and it is both emphatic and intensive meaning that, “He and He alone will”, will ensure that this work He desires completed will be perfected in us.

Our belief then rests on the character of our Heavenly Father, based upon our understanding that “it is impossible for God to lie” and that “with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” From this we can therefore have supreme confidence in His assertion that He is God, that He has the power to bring about the finality of this peace.

The second point of encouraging exhortation concerning the Father is this “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it”. Here the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle seeks to dispel any lingering doubts, our Heavenly Father is completely trustworthy. Literally, to show the emphasis, the text places emphasis on Yahweh’s faithfulness in that it reads, “Faithful is the One, Who calls you, Who also will do it.” The trustworthiness and fidelity of the Almighty then is reinforced towards these brethren and our selves, it forms the seal to the great purpose of this powerful prayer.

The Apostle having prayed this prayer outlining his spiritual desires for these brethren and sisters at Thessalonica and then Paul asserts that our Heavenly Father is more than capable of performing his prayer. We brethren and sisters need to have the faith of the great patriarch Job who said in the midst of his calamity: “though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”.

Like these Thessalonian brethren and sisters, when unpleasant problems and issues confront our lives. Let us rejoice and acknowledge that He is dealing with us as sons and so is sanctifying us to his glory and our eternal well being.

Brethren and sisters as is witnessed by the emblems upon the table our Heavenly Father is completely trustworthy in that He has already raised his son from the dead. This prayer of the Apostle exhorts us to be strong and of a good courage for I will never leave nor forsake thee. For in the prayer we see the desire of the Father towards those who shall make up the bride for his son.

Jude verse 24

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”.

Let us remember the one who has overcome the world and upon whom we wait. As we come now to partake of these emblems, we see the one who gave himself for us in that body prepared as the perfect sacrifice, as is evident in the bread. Which is the word made flesh our example of a life of sanctification. For the word is our tool in working with the Father in our sanctification, after the Master’s example

Likewise in the wine we see the shed blood of our Lord and Master and we acknowledge the great price that was paid. A price, which our Heavenly Father was willingly pleased to pay, because of what it would accomplish through his son. Thus in the shed blood we see our necessary part in showing the efficacy of his sacrifice in the laying down of our lives for our brethren. Just as He laid down his life for his friends.

In 2nd Corinthians Chapter 13 and at verse 11 we read

“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you”.

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