

# Northolt Park Baptist Church

## Praying for the Church: 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Paul often says he is praying for the churches he wrote to; in fact, he normally says he prays *constantly* for them – just as he does here (1:11). And more than this, Paul doesn't say, like I sometimes say, 'I'll pray for you', and leave it there; he tells us *what* he prays for them. He opens his pastor's heart to show the love that kept him constantly talking to God on their behalf. We've been looking at the main prayers, but there are a lot more scattered through his letters, places where Paul is writing, and he suddenly bursts into prayer for them. Even in this short letter of 2 Thessalonians, we have a few examples where Paul suddenly flows into prayer: 2:16-17; 3:5; 3:16-18.

We've been suggesting, as we look at these prayers, that we learn from them for our own prayers for the church. What kinds of things does Paul ask God for? Do *we* pray those things for the church? What are Paul's priorities for the church? Are those *our* priorities too? That's been the challenge and the encouragement for us – to bring our prayers into line with those of the Bible.

Before we come to the prayer in verses 11 and 12, let's remind ourselves of what Paul has said so far. Paul begins by giving thanks to God for them (1:3). Why is he thankful? Because their faith is growing (1:3a), their love is increasing (1:3b), and they are persevering under trial (1:4). Most of Paul's letters contain a section near the start where he expresses thanks for the people he's writing to. (In fact, it's only when Paul writes to the Galatians, when he's cross with them for being led astray, that he doesn't thank God!) There's a challenge for us here too. Maybe we need to develop a habit of *thanking* God for others. It would be a good spiritual exercise to think of people in the church, and thank God for signs of love and grace and faith in their lives. Let's learn to be thankful for each other, and express that gratitude to God.

Not only is Paul confident about their faith and love, he goes on to say he is confident about their future hope (1:5-10). They have remained faithful, and will be vindicated by God when the day of judgment comes. That's the context for his prayer. That's why he begins in verse 11 with the words 'With this in mind...' In other words, 'bearing in mind all that I've said about the coming judgment, we constantly pray like this...' So, *what* does Paul pray? And why? Paul gives the *content* of the prayer in verse 11, and he gives the *goal* of the prayer in verse 12.

### 1. The content of the prayer (1:11)

There are two main requests in the prayer...

#### (a) Their calling: being counted worthy

First, Paul prays that they will be counted worthy (1:11a). It's important to realise that Paul doesn't pray this because he's not confident for them. He *is* confident, as we've already seen (1:3-4). In fact, he also talks about them being counted worthy in 1:5 too. Now he prays again in verse 11 that God will count them worthy of their calling.

In fact, Paul often comes back to this in his letters. We are already children of God, but we must now live up to that calling. It's a determination to 'follow through' in the Christian life, to 'make good' on our call – to be worthy of being a child of God, worthy of the love that brought Jesus to the cross to save us from the punishment Paul has just written about. But it's important to note that this is a prayer directed to God. He doesn't just ask the Thessalonians to try harder. He is praying that *God himself* will make them worthy.

This is Paul's main concern: not that we be successful, wealthy, happy, beautiful, fulfilled, even healthy, not that all our problems will disappear, not that the trials will be taken away. First and foremost, he wants us to live up to the calling we have received. That's what he

prays for. When did we last pray a prayer this for ourselves? Or for our spouse? Or for our children? Or for each other? Or for the church? Let's pray for things that really matter.

But Paul prays for something else...

### **(b) Their activities: fulfilling every good purpose**

If the first request is about their *calling*, the second request is about their *activities* (1:11b). Paul wants God's power to be at work in them, fulfilling every good purpose, and every act.

This appears to be a prayer that God will help turn their good desires into action. We probably all know from personal experience that there is a difference between desire and performance. I can really *want* to do something, I can even *intend* to do something; but wanting and intending are not themselves doing! For many years, I've wanted to walk one of the long distance paths, like the Ridgeway, or the Thames Path. I have the walking boots. I've bought walking magazines and even some books about the paths. But I still haven't done one of the actual walks! The desire is there; the intention is sort of there; but somehow desire and intention hasn't resulted in action. There might be all sorts of things in our lives where we have aspirations that – for whatever reason, good, bad, or indifferent – just don't happen.

Likewise in the church. We can have good intentions. But good intentions might come to nothing. Paul prays that God will give them success at turning desire into action, turning purpose into act. Good desires and purposes are great, but we need power to carry them out; that power doesn't come from us, but from God. Again, what a great thing to pray for. Let's pray for the power of God to work in us so that we will fulfil every desire for goodness, so that our good intentions become actual realities.

## **2. The goal of the prayer (1:12)**

Then Paul gives us the goal of the prayer in verse 12. Why is it important to do these things? So that the world will be impressed? So we can feel smug self-satisfaction? There's a

far more important reason: that the name of Jesus might be glorified. The ultimate lever which gives prayer its power is the glory of Christ: that is the supreme motivation.

When God's people live a life worthy of his call, and when they resolve to work that out in good purposes and acts of faith, then Christ is glorified. Jesus is honoured among us – him in you, and you in him, prays Paul. The glory of the Lord Jesus is spread and shared among his followers – like football supporters who celebrate the victory of their team, and bask in the shared glory.

It's always possible to do things and want to get glory for *ourselves*, whether it be in preaching a sermon, leading a Bible study, visiting the sick, attending a prayer meeting, doing the flowers – hoping we might be praised for what we have done. And, of course, we should be grateful for all people do. But it's not the final or ultimate reason. We ask these things, says Paul, not so that you will be remarkable Christians, or gain a reputation for yourselves, but so that the name of the Lord Jesus will be glorified.

And it's all on the basis of grace that comes from God and Jesus (1:12b). It's the Lord Jesus and God the Father who has loved us, and is the giver of grace and encouragement and hope (see also the prayer in 2:16-17). We'll need more than our own resources to cope; but God has given us all we need.

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Paul's vision is broad: he thinks of the grace we have received in the past, the ongoing direction of our lives, and our ultimate home in the new heavens and the new earth. And the things he asks God for align with this; his goals for the church match up with what *God* wants for them: being counted worthy of their calling, fulfilling every good purpose, giving us eternal encouragement and hope, encouraging our hearts and strengthening us in every good deed and word. Let's pray it for ourselves, and for our church – constantly.