

A PRAYER AND A PROMISE

The Gospel Difference, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

June 4, 2023

*Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt.
Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.
May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.
May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*
1 Thessalonians 5:23

Final instructions

¹² Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

¹⁶ Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹ Do not put out the Spirit's fire; ²⁰ do not treat prophecies with contempt. ²¹ Test everything. Hold on to the good. ²² Avoid every kind of evil.

²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

²⁵ Brothers, pray for us. ²⁶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. ²⁷ I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

1 Thessalonians 5

1. These instructions are very personal, more like the first four commandments than the final six.
2. As in 4:3-8, the Christian life always points to something to avoid and something to hold on to
3. The normal Christian life depends on God's sanctifying work and looks forward to the *Parousia*
4. Paul expected his letter to be "preached"

A series of very relational imperatives (developed from the ESV)

In the church: Work for order (I like this starting point better than 1 Corinthians 14:40)

*We ask you, brothers,
to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,
and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.
Be at peace among yourselves.*

Among the brothers: Paul wants us to start with the more difficult cases (see 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)

*And we urge you, brothers,
admonish the idle,
encourage the fainthearted,
help the weak,
be patient with them all.
See that no one repays anyone evil for evil,
but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.*

Regarding the Spirit: the disciplines of joy, prayer and thanksgiving prepare believers to receive and discern

*Rejoice always,
pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
Do not quench the Spirit.
Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.
Abstain from every form of evil.
Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,
and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

Regarding Paul: Paul ends with how much he depends on the church (see 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5)

*Brothers, pray for us.
Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.
I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*



Is sanctification required? (with some help from John Piper and B. B. Warfield)

⁸ So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time

2 Timothy 1:8-10 (see John 15 for another perspective)

The LORD said to Moses, ² “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy

Leviticus 19

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 (remember the discussion from 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, especially 4:7)

1. Sanctification is a celebration of grace
2. Sanctification is essential to authentic conversion (along with “belief in the truth”)
3. Sanctification is the objective evidence of conversion (see passages like 2 John 2:1-8)

Living in anticipation of the *Parousia*

1. *Labora et ora*

²³ *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

¹³ *Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

1 Peter 1

2. This is a promise based on God’s call and his character

²⁴ *The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*

1 Thessalonians 5:24

¹⁷ *Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

1 Peter 1

3. Pray for what Paul prayed for

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. ² And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. ⁴ We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.

2 Thessalonians 2 (and see Spurgeon’s sermon on 5:17)

Resources for reading 1 Thessalonians

The poster for 1 Thessalonians can be found at bibleproject.com

Doug's favorite 1 Thessalonians commentaries include

Charles Wannamaker's NIGTC volume (Eerdmans, 1990)

Hendricksen's *Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1955)

Robert Thomas' volume in *Expositors' Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981)

John MacArthur has a very interesting sermon, "The Ideal Church" at <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1317A>

Spurgeon's sermon on 5:17 is at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols16-18/chs1039.pdf> This sermon ends with this challenge:

Beloved, you have prayed very earnestly for the pastor when he has been sick. Your prayers have been his consolation and his restoration. Will you not pray for him now that he is able to preach the Gospel, that his health may be sanctified to God's service, and the ministry of the truth may be mighty in the winning of souls? I ask it of you. I think I might claim it of you. I do beseech you, brethren, pray for us.

Suppose again, dear brethren, there were no conversions in our midst, would you not pray? And since there are a great many conversions, should that be a reason for leaving off? Shall we worship God the less because He gives us more? Instead of one prayer which would go up were there no conversions, there should be ten now that He continues to work salvation among us.

Suppose we were divided, and had many schisms, and jealousies, and much bickering, would not the faithful ones pray in bitterness of spirit? Will you not pray since there are no divisions and much Christian love? Surely, I say again, you will not treat God the worse because He treats you the better. That were foolish indeed.

Suppose we were surrounded today with hosts of persecutors, and error everywhere crept into our midst, and did us damage, would you not pray, you who love the Lord? And now that we live in days of peace, and error, though it prowls around, is kept out of our fold, will you not commune with the Lord all the more? I will say yet a third time, shall we pray the less because God gives the more? Oh no, but the better He is to us, the more let us adore and magnify His name.

Just now we need to pray because some are growing cold and turning to their old sins. We need to pray because we are doing much for Christ. Every agency is in full work. We want a great blessing upon great efforts. We have had such results from prayer as might make a man's ears tingle who should hear of them for the first time—our history as a church has not been second even to apostolic history itself. We have seen God's arm made bare in the eyes of all the people, and to the ends of the earth the testimony of this pulpit has gone forth, and thousands have found the Savior—all in answer to many prayers.

Pray, then, without ceasing. O church in the Tabernacle, hold fast what you have, that no man take your crown. Oh, continue to be a praying church that we together, when we shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ, pastor and people, may not be accused of being prayerless, nor of being slack in the work of the Lord. I earnestly hope all this will tend to make tomorrow's day of prayer more earnest and intense. But yet more do I pray that at all times all of us may be fervent, frequent, instant, and constant in prayer, praying in the Holy Ghost, in the name of Jesus.

John Newton's "Great Advent" sermon is at <https://www.monergism.com/great-advent>

Thomas Schreiner has a wonderful essay on the optimism in 1 Thessalonians at http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/3.3_editorial.pdf

J. C. Ryle has a good commentary on the end of 1 Thessalonians at (attached below)

https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/hold_fast.htm and
https://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/prove_all_things.htm

B. B. Warfield has a great commentary on 5:23-24 at <https://www.monergism.com/entire-sanctification-1-thessalonians-523-24>

John Piper has several very good sermons on 1 Thessalonians at <https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/1-thessalonians?page=3> His sermon on 5:23-24 is at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-sanctifies-his-people>