

A Relevant Benediction

Call to Worship: Psalm 66:1-4

Hymn #280- *I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord*

1st Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-15

Hymn #487- *Faith of Our Fathers*

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Hymn #271- *How Sweet and Awful is the Place*

Introduction

Having thoroughly dealt with the dangerous false teaching, which was infiltrating the church, concerning the return of Christ, and having expressed his thankfulness to God, for electing and saving the Thessalonian brethren (in contrast to those who are given over to the wicked ploys of Satan), Paul now closes this section out with a relevant benediction; a prayer of invocation, as it were, to God, on behalf of the Thessalonians.

I. A Relevant Benediction

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."

As we consider this glorious benediction, brethren, we will divide it into two main parts, and these two main parts will be divided into two sub-parts:

- 1) We will consider who it is that Paul invokes here.
 - a) The motivation for appealing to these specific individuals.
 - b) The assurance to be had, in appealing to these specific individuals.
- 2) We will consider the specific appeal that is made in this benediction.
 - a) The two-fold plea that is made.
 - b) The contextual relevance of this two-fold plea.

II. Who it is that Paul Invokes?

"Now may *our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father...*"

Who is it that Paul invokes here? "*Our Lord Jesus Christ, and our God and Father.*"

Now, before we get to the motivation for appealing to these individuals, just simply note Paul's

repeated use of the possessive adjective "our" here. This, in itself, is a great encouragement, because it removes any notion that Paul's appeal is unrealistic in any sense. In other words, if I told you that I was going to make a request (on your behalf) for some sum of money, from Donald Trump or President Barack Obama or someone of great import, who doesn't know me from Adam, you would say, "Yeah, that's great and all, but you're either unrealistic or crazy or both. None of those men will give you the time of day, to even speak to them, let alone grant you a request of any sort." But, if either of these men were a close relative or friend of mine, you would find a lot more comfort in my willingness to make such a request.

Here, Paul reveals his appeal, as an appeal made to *our* Lord and *our* God and Father. You see, the personal relationship that exists between Jesus and us, and God and us, leads us not only to believe that He will hear such an appeal, but furthermore, that He bids us to make such appeals. And so, just by adding this personal aspect to his invocation, Paul is saying, as it were, "May the Lord Jesus, who is our Lord, and the Heavenly Father, who is our God and Father, do these things on your behalf." Jesus is our Master and Lord. God is our God and Father. We are personally, intimately related to both, in our union with Christ. What a wonderful thing to remind ourselves about, over and over again, brethren, when we pray to, and petition our God, concerning any matter of importance to us! We don't come before a God, who is distant or unknown and foreign to us. Rather, we come to a God, who is our Father, and a Christ, who is our Lord and Master, both of whom, delight in us!

a) Moving on then, we find here a double motivation, which would compel Paul to invoke (to appeal to) these two Individuals. He invokes our Lord Jesus Christ and our God and Father, because God has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope..." Even a lord can hate and abuse his subjects. And even a father can neglect and spurn his children. In fact, sadly, we see such things happen (often), even in our own culture.

But, this Lord, and this Father has loved us! Paul has just emphasized this reality in his encouraging statement of thanksgiving to God, back in verse 13, when he thanked God for the Thessalonian brethren, who were, "beloved by the Lord." And how was that evidenced? How exactly can we confirm the very unique and precious love that God has for His children? Well, out of a naturally fallen and condemned world of God-haters, where the far greater majority will

deservingly perish in their sins, God has set His love upon some, and He has elected them to receive all of the glorious benefits of salvation to be gained and procured in Christ! And by His Spirit, he would set them apart, and lead them to embrace the truth, which would bring them into all of the benefits that were merited and gained by Christ! And so, the very faith that exists in our souls, directed away from ourselves and toward Christ, is one (of many) of the stark evidences of God's love for us, His children! And so, Paul can appeal to God on behalf of the Thessalonians; He can invoke the Living God with great boldness and confidence, because of the evident love that God has shown, and continues to show, toward them, in the full gamut of their inherited salvation in Christ!

And in loving them in this way, He has given them "everlasting consolation and good hope." These Thessalonians were suffering dearly from ongoing persecution. They had lost some of their loved ones because of this persecution. But God, in Christ; in the unshakeable, irrevocable union that He has brought about between them and His own beloved son, He has given them great consolation and comfort. No, more than that, He has given them "everlasting consolation!" It is a deeply embedded comfort to the soul that has no end ever in view, secured irremovably by the certainty of God's sure Word, and the finished work of Christ! No event or suffering or alleged tragedy, bound to this short, temporal life could ultimately touch that consolation (though it may not always be felt), because it assures and secures the eternal destiny of the soul, forever and ever! God provides that type of assurance for all who are in Christ; an assurance that carries the day, when everything else seems to fall apart!

He gives everlasting consolation "*and good hope.*" Not simply hope; certainly not a "wishful" type of hope that may or may not come to pass (i.e. I hope to be married one day, I hope to be a doctor...etc). No, rather a good and sure and certain hope, which only exists as hope in the present, because it has not yet been realized. But the destination is certain. The victory is already guaranteed! The full realization and experience of the success is there, right around the corner. Christ has purchased it! He was raised as the first fruits unto it! And we, His people, are heading right into it! The glory is just up ahead! We reach after it, we prepare for it, we move toward it, it awaits us! And so, we hope for it, as that certain end, which we long for, but just have not yet reached in the present, because we have more work to do here first.

And so, all in all, Paul is motivated to appeal to the Lord Jesus Christ (*our* Lord Jesus Christ) and *our* God and Father, with great expectation, because He has loved us, and He has given us everlasting consolation and good hope. But notice further, two words, which Paul attaches to all of this, making this motivation more certain, and bringing us into our second sub-topic to this first main point, concerning who it is that Paul invokes.

b) The assurance to be had, in appealing to these specific individuals. If all of this weren't motivation enough to presume that God is more than willing to answer Paul's request on behalf of the Thessalonians, consider the two word vault, within which, the everlasting consolation and good hope of God find their origin of residence:

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope *by grace...*" By grace! Every hope of blessing from God; every ounce of assurance of His steadfast love for us in Christ; the whole package of all of the good that God determines to do to His people, springs *not* out of anything we have done or will ever do! It springs out of His grace; His free and unearned favor! You see, as Paul invokes God here, on behalf of the Thessalonians, he does so, not only because of what God has done already for them, but because of the very motive for why God has done and will continue to do all things for them. And this is beyond encouraging, isn't it? If God's grace is the constant drawer, out of which, God brings out any and all blessings for His people, then His people ought to have no fear of going to Him, again and again, in Christ! In fact, that is exactly why Christ bids us to go to the Father, in His Name, at all times! And that is why the Father is sincerely delighted in hearing our requests and in doing us good and not harm, even in spite of our remaining struggles with sin! God never gives up on His people; indeed, He bids His people to come to Him constantly and continually, because He deals with us *not* on the basis of our good works or on how well we have progressed spiritually today, but always, only, on the basis of His free grace and favor in Christ! Do you see that, brethren? Don't let those two little words pass you by too quickly. They weigh far more in their meaning than they look in the amount of letters that make them up! "By grace!"

And so, the assurance that Paul has, when He appeals to *our* Lord Jesus Christ and *our* God and Father, that his appeal will be heard and received, is grounded in the reality that the very basis, foundation and entire structure of our relationship with God is always "by grace."

Having this critical background in mind, we can now move on to consider the second major portion of this benediction, with its two sub-parts.

III. The Specific Appeal that is Made

Having considered "who it is," that Paul invokes, naturally, we now move on to consider the specific appeal that is made to "our Lord Jesus Christ and our God and Father."

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, *comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.*"

a) Moving into our first sub-part then, we consider the twofold plea that is made here. And that twofold plea consists of a desire for God to act upon both, the hearts and the actions of the Thessalonians.

Paul appeals to God to comfort the hearts of the Thessalonians. Assuming all that we have gone over already about the inclination of God toward blessing His people, Paul invokes God to grant the Thessalonians the only type of comfort that can enable His suffering people to persevere in the face of very real, difficult and present trials. This comfort, no doubt, is the comfort, which the Holy Spirit brings to the people of God. He is the Comforter, who warms the hearts and minds of God's people, with new and fresh thoughts about the love of God toward them, in Christ. And in this implied sense, we would find the Trinity, here revealed in this text.

And in the second part of this plea, Paul asks that God would establish the Thessalonians in every good word and work. And once again, the work of the Holy Spirit would be implied here as well. For, the Holy Spirit not only comforts the hearts of God's people, but He also directs and guides their actions. He keeps them faithful and on course. He establishes and settles (strengthens) them in every good word and work, so that they are not shaken or removed from the path of obedience to Christ.

And so, again, while the appeal is made to our Lord Jesus Christ and our God and Father, the very nature of the actual appeal itself, involves a plea for God to grant His people the blessing of the Holy Spirit, so as to comfort their hearts and establish their words and works. The inner motivations and the outer spoken words and works of service are all to be directed by the Holy Spirit, if God's people are to complete the course that God has set before them. In a very real sense, what Paul requests here, would line right up with the Lord Jesus Christ's words, which sprung out of His call to persistent prayer. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give *the Holy Spirit* to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:13)!

b) And then, finally, in our second sub-part to this second portion of Paul's benediction, we conclude with "the contextual relevance of this twofold plea."

As has been consistent with the Apostle Paul, his benedictions always prove to be relevant to the specific needs of his audience. Now, this benediction would be good for anyone, but it is especially relevant for a people who are suffering continually, and who are tempted to move away from the critical truths of the gospel. Such a people need to be warned against adopting false teachings... in this case, the claim that Christ had already returned. But, they also need to be comforted in their afflictions. They were suffering continually from persecution, from the time that they first came to Christ, right up to the time that this second letter was written. And so, Paul, like a skilled surgeon, deals with the cancer and encourages them onward. He warns them of the danger of forsaking the truth, but he assures them of his confidence in God's electing of them from before the foundation of the world. And then, here, he makes known his appeal to God on their behalf. That, in the midst of their great afflictions, the God, who has loved them and given them everlasting consolation, would comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work. In a nut shell, he desired that God would cause them to "keep on keeping on."

IV. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Having worked through the text, brethren, let us conclude our time by considering a few, relevant, closing applications:

1) Brethren, let us exemplify the type of care that Paul exercises, when dealing with matters of confrontation. There was an urgent necessity to correct a problem, which had been brought to Paul's attention, concerning the Thessalonians. They were being told that Christ may have already returned. Had they believed this lie, it would have undone all of Paul's faithful labors among them. And so, Paul sent them this letter. This letter could have been written in many different ways, but Paul, no doubt, with prayer, and of course, under the influence of the Holy Spirit (this is Scripture) wrote this with great love and care. He knew that these brethren were under the constant strain of persecution. And so, he openly made the extraction (he didn't sugar coat the truth), but he did so, in a way that would build them up and encourage them onward in the process.

Paul didn't just beat them with the truth, did he? He didn't throw them in the dock and give them the third degree. No, relying on the Holy Spirit, he did what was necessary, factoring in their present circumstances, to safely move them along. Let this move us, brethren, to adopt such a methodology for approaching one another, when confrontation is necessary. We need to be a people who are willing to confront one another, when we see anyone treading down a path where danger lies ahead. But, we need to do this prayerfully, and in love, making sure that our motives are not driven by pride, but rather, a sincere love for Christ and for His sheep.

2) Brethren, take note of the fact that God is able to comfort the heart, as well as direct the actions. God can keep us from stumbling and present us faultless before His throne, with exceeding joy! God knows our weaknesses. He knows that we are but dust. He knows that we are naturally inept and incapable of doing a single thing to please Him, on our own. And so, He willingly provides all that is necessary for the journey that we have in front of us. But brethren, we need to be a people of prayer! We need to be a people who ask...daily! Yes, God will bring us to various avenues of struggle on the journey forward (for the good of our sanctification), but He will keep us the whole way...if we but ask. "How much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?" Are you still in the habit of knocking and asking...or have you given that up long ago. Are you too busy with other things than to consider the daily need of grace for your own walk with Christ? What could ever be more important than to ensure that the comfort and the guidance of the Holy Spirit are ever with you? Would you presume that you can

take the wheel for even one day, one hour, one minute, one second? Let us be a people of prayer!

3) Recall to mind, often brethren, that your everlasting consolation in this world and the next, is found in Christ, and in Christ alone! And that consolation always comes to you (every single moment) by God's free grace. And so, whatever context you find yourself in each day (suffering, failure, sorrow, joy...etc), you have every right, in Christ; Indeed, God bids you, in Christ, to take that mental walk to Golgotha's mountain, to remind yourself that that horrific scene, merged into an empty tomb, is your everlasting consolation, peace and hope! "Here I am, in a life full of knots, challenges and innumerable dilemmas, but ahhh, Jesus is my rest and hope!" Indeed, He promised that in the world I would have tribulation, but in Him, I have eternal peace...and I can be of good cheer, right now, because He has overcome the world!" In all that I face, I am not alone. My God is with me, and He ordains all for my good! And just around the corner, I am to be greeted and embraced by Christ, in the body, forever and ever! Hallelujah! What a Savior! Hallelujah, what a Friend!" Amen!

[The Gospel]

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!