

Exhortation: Kings Bromley

Date 18/5/08

Title: How will we finish?

Reading: 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:11 - 13

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### **In Philippians Chapter 1 and at verse 6 we read**

*“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”.*

The question my dear brethren and sisters, as we sit here today, is not so much our beginning in the truth. For I am sure we all began well enough, nor even is it our present estate, but surely the question for us all to ponder is how will, each of us finish?

In our New Testament reading for the day the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle Paul provides us with both encouragement and comfort in this regard. For we all know 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 desire, but something that would provide our Father with the greatest pleasure imaginable.

Thus when we come to consider by way of exhortation the short prayer at the end of third chapter of first Thessalonians, we find our Heavenly Father and our beloved Master, are working tirelessly to achieve this very end.

Now this prayer report of the Apostle provides a bridge between the two main sections of the epistle, thus it is entirely appropriate for its placing here. Usually in the first section of the Epistles we have doctrinal implications of the truth and then in the second section, we have the practical outworking in the lives of the saints of those doctrinal truths. The focus in the second section is upon personal holiness in our walk before the Father.

It might be appropriate brethren and sisters to give a quick potted background to the situation for this prayer. The Apostle, having left prison in Philippi moved onto Thessalonica, as part of his second missionary journey. Now it appears he was only in the city a short time.

Acts chapter seventeen highlights that the Apostle Paul seemed to be only present for three Sabbaths. Undoubtedly he would have stayed longer, but Jewish persecution arose and the Apostle and his team had to leave the city sharply.

Yet whatever time Paul and his companions spent in the city two things are certain, firstly he had a great impact upon the Thessalonians that an ecclesia was developed and secondly they in turn had a similar impact upon him. The Apostle desired to return to them and indeed attempted to do so it would appear at every opportunity, but as we read in chapter two, he was hindered at every turn.

So as time continued he felt bereaved for these brethren and sisters and was greatly anxious regarding their state. Finally when he could not take not knowing how they fared any longer he dispatched Timothy. Where upon Timothy having returned to the Apostle brought good news, which was cause for great rejoicing by the Apostle and the brethren with him. Now although comforted the Apostle desired still to return unto them and it is this desire that prompts the prayer we have here at the end of chapter three.

Surely brethren & sisters the chief reason why the Eternal Spirit has placed on permanent record so many of the prayers of the Apostle is so that the saints of all succeeding ages might receive instruction, encouragement, exhortation and comfort from them. All of these prayers list particular blessings, which brethren and sisters in all ages are too especially desire, prize, and seek an increase of and this prayer here is no different.

Indeed when we examine these prayers brethren and sisters we find that they teach us how we are to be workers together with our Heavenly Father. In that many of these prayers give us insight and instruction concerning aspects to our life in the truth that **only** our Heavenly Father alone can impart, sustain, and promote to us. In turn we find out of our Heavenly Father's impact into our daily lives, what should be our response, as we diligently strive to realise the blessings contained in these prayers in our ecclesial and everyday lives.

Brethren and sisters it is of fundamental importance that we each see prayer as not only rightly part, of our worship; but chiefly a weapon or a tool in the daily battle for

faithfulness. The Apostle Paul models for us here how prayer can be such a tool in our individual ministry and service for our Heavenly Father.

Interestingly brethren and sisters we tend to think of prayer as an immediate tool, to aid us in our present distress. I am pretty sure that is the general focus if we are honest of most of our prayers the here and now. Excluding of course praying for the coming of the kingdom and our Lord.

Now the Apostle manifests to us here in this short, but beautifully crafted prayer both an immediate practical need and a sustaining long-term requirement for these 1<sup>st</sup> century Thessalonians. We likewise need to develop in our prayers this long-term perspective of our ongoing spiritual and practical needs.

**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Chapter 3 and verses 11 – 13**

*“Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”*

The first thing we **note** about the prayer is that it is motivated out of the Apostles’ and his team’s loving relationship with the Thessalonians and that this “*relational love*” then becomes the key focus of the prayer. The Apostle reports three precise and particular things, He prays for them:

- He prays that our Heavenly Father might clear the way for him to return
- He prays that their love might increase for each other and outreach to unbelievers
- He prays that the Lord would establish their hearts and conduct in holiness until his coming

For the Eternal Spirit and the Apostle Paul, are intimately concerned with how these brethren and sisters will finish, will they finish well? What about us my dear brethren and sisters will we be able to say with the Apostle “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*”?

Glance back to the end of chapter two where we have these words “*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*” Is this how we see one another?

To this we can add the words in verse five of chapter three “*I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain*”. Do we each feel this same anxiousness with regards to our labour and service in the ecclesia?

Our Heavenly Father has placed each of us together in this ecclesial setting that we might aid one another to finish well. Surely this is exactly how we should see both our ecclesial service and our personal ministry within the ecclesia brethren and sisters.

Thus the Apostle begins his prayer in verse eleven with these words “*now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*” The Apostle acknowledges that our redemption and salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ originates with our Heavenly Father. For He is the first cause and the prime mover in this work. All of the Apostle’s efforts and indeed ours brethren are meaningless if they are not in accordance with the will of our God.

Firstly then the Apostle highlights to us the sovereignty of our Heavenly Father in all things with regards to our lives. Our God brethren and sisters is not a god, which is either stand offish or remote, as the pagan deities were, but rather our Father is intimately concerned and involved with our day to day lives.

We see the truth of this in the beginning of this prayer for in the Greek the word “*himself*” in the Greek text comes first at the beginning of the sentence and is emphatic. Here we see that our relationship with Yahweh our God is a personal one, which He takes seriously. This relationship is further stressed for us with the inclusion of the words “*and our Father*”. Our relationship is not only personal, but also intimate in that the Almighty is our Father and He regards us, as his children in Christ.

The Apostle is bringing before us the Fatherly care of our God; we are being exhorted to look unto him as a faithful father. Remember that this prayer was given on behalf of a group of brethren and sisters undergoing tremendous tribulation and persecution. A group of people that had been pagans and who knew nothing of the concept of the fatherhood of God.

It is a very real danger for us in times of trial to conclude that our God is indeed aloof and not concerned with our individual circumstances.

One commentator graphically records that “*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains*”. Rather than distancing ourselves from him in our pain, we need to draw near to our Father.

The Apostle continues by adding “*and our Lord Jesus Christ*”. **Notice carefully** brethren and sisters we have the full title of our Master. Here we are being reminded of the Master’s current position as head of the ecclesia and of his ongoing High Priestly work of intercession on our behalf.

Now not only that we are reminded that in his current position our Father has placed all things into his control with the express desire that the ecclesia might be conformed to his image. Thus everything that both happens in the world outside, within the ecclesia inside and in our individual lives are contributing to that very purpose. No matter how remotely possible it seems to us at times, due to our finite insight.

Interestingly the construction of the Greek here is fascinating. For this sentence in the Greek in verse eleven has two subjects our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, but it has only one action word, the verb “*direct*”. Thus the Trinitarians use this passage as proof of the trinity within scripture. Yet most Greek scholars argue that although they personally believe in the Trinity, this verse does not imply the trinity at all, but their unity of purpose.

Indeed it powerfully indicates to us that the Father and Son are united in both their desire and work with regards to the saints. This is of such an important point that it needs to be stressed brethren and sisters. For often you will here it said that the Master in his work of intercession is somehow placating the anger of the Father in relation to us. This passage proves that this is just not true, the two are perfectly united in their objective to complete that good work, which has been begun in every one of us.

Trials in our life come as a consequence of two things firstly our own stupidity and sinfulness and secondly the direct divine placement in our lives. In both cases these chastisements are designed to develop the holiness that is spoken of in this prayer. Even with regard to our errors through weakness our Heavenly Father is more than able to turn them unto his glory and our eternal good.

### Hebrews Chapter 12 and verses 6 & 7

*“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”*

Now comes the first petition of the prayer that our Heavenly Father and our Master would “*direct our way unto you*”. Here we see again the Apostle’s desire to return unto them and again see them face to face. He longs not only to see them, but also as verse ten shows to actually have a hand in what he is praying for them.

### Verse 10

*“Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?”*

Here is an important exhortation for each one of us brethren and sisters. How often do you pray for some blessing for another brother or sister and yet expect our Heavenly Father to accomplish that blessing through some other agency. The Apostle prays that he might be involved that he might be the agency of his prayer’s fulfilment. Although Paul, does not know how the Father will answer his prayer. He expresses his prayer in the form of a wish to leave himself open to our Heavenly Father's will. He is praying for the Father and our Master to act, yet at the same time he is volunteering his service and saying “*here am I send me*”.

In effect he is seeking to be a fellow labourer with the Father, when was the last time you offered your service in this way brethren and sisters?

Thus the Apostle petitions for his way to be made clear, so he and his team can return to Thessalonica. Now this word “*direct*” has two basic meanings, **firstly** to “*show the way*” in other words to guide the disciple and **secondly** to make the path of the just, “*straight and so clear of obstacles*” that impede their way.

These two basic meanings B & S powerfully manifest to us that we are not on our own our Heavenly Father and our Master through the Angels and our brethren and sisters are indeed intimately involved in our day-to-day lives, both as individuals and collectively as an ecclesia.

In this eleventh verse then is a beautiful and extremely powerful wish of the Eternal Spirit manifested in the loving care and desire of the Apostle Paul and his brethren for

this young fledgling ecclesia. For this word “*direct*” is a **wish** being in the optative mood in the Greek. He desired to know our Heavenly Father’s will with regards to this Thessalonian ecclesia.

More than this brethren and sisters in the Greek we find that this word is in the Aorist active tense confirming to us that until the Apostle’s desire is granted. He and his team will continue to pray for his return. Now the word in the Greek is also an intensive word showing to us quite clearly the ongoing great and concentrated effort that is expended by the Apostle and his team on behalf of these 1<sup>st</sup> century brethren and sisters in Thessalonica (*glance at verse 10*).

Do you know brethren and sisters that the Apostle probably had to pray this prayer for around five years before it was granted in the mercy of our Heavenly Father. For in Acts chapter twenty the Apostle as part of his third missionary journey was able to return to the city.

For only an omnipotent God and a concerned Father can remove the roadblocks that appear in our lives and He does so not at our pleasure, but at his. It took five years for the Father and the Lord to deem the moment right to remove the obstacles in the path of the Apostle.

Now if we are honest brethren we struggle with this concept of praying for something for more than a few weeks, never mind such a length of time. Yet the scriptures are full of such examples of faithful brethren and sisters who prayed for many years before their petitions were granted. Probably the most poignant examples are of those who prayed for children due to apparent bareness. Let us learn from the Apostle’s example then to persevere in prayer, for in so we will learn discipline, but also show the depth and proof of our faith.

Now the Apostle continues his prayer moving onto his second petition in verse twelve. He now focuses his attention on the development of these brethren and sisters in the meantime, before he is able to return to them.

#### **Verse 12**

*“And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you.”*

The “*Lord*” here is specifically the Master our Lord Jesus Christ. For he is the agency we know the Father has charged with perfecting the ecclesia, as all power in heaven and earth is now vested in him.

The Apostle prayed that the Master through his example and particularly his current providential care will cause these first century brethren and sisters and us increase in love. Now both the words “*increase*” **and** “*abound*” are likewise strong wishes of the Apostle on behalf of his brethren being also in the optative mood in the Greek. For he knows that without such providential goading their love will find a natural comfortable level and remain there.

**In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Chapter 4 and at verses 9 & 10**

*“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: **for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.** And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which, are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more”.*

Now the capacity to manifest the love of God in one’s life, is directly in relation to how you perceive and receive the love of God shed abroad into you own heart and life. The fact that this love needs to be taught to us and modelled for us (*as Paul did*), and as we see here in the emblems before us upon the table. Prove that this dual capacity to receive and then manifest this love of God is counter-intuitive to our nature.

Yet this increase in love was as the Apostle indicates their greatest need. For this increased capacity to love would bind them together during their persecution. It would serve as a counterpoint to the rejection they faced within society, because of their faith. At the same time this strong love would be a powerful witness of the truth and is able to overcome the evil brought upon them by their persecutors. As we read elsewhere “*be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*” (*glance at chapter 5:15*).

The use of these two words together reinforce one another and point emphatically to the fact that their love should be **continually multiplying, increasing in intensity and strength, and overflowing** from one to another. The word for “*love*” here is “*agape*”, speaking of that divine sacrificial love that we have come to remember in these emblems of bread and wine upon the table before us.



Yet brethren and sisters the key thing about this love is not so much the sacrificial nature of the love, but rather it requires a decision of the will in choosing to love another sacrificially.

It is this decision of the will that these Thessalonian brethren and sisters and indeed we today need help with brethren and sisters, *“for our spirit is indeed willing, but our flesh is weak”*. Now **notice** that this spring of overflowing love has two objects, firstly *“one another”* and secondly to *“all men”*. The first is the primary focus of their love and the second is towards all others who cross their path, as we are instructed in:

**Galatians Chapter 6 and at verse 10**

*“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”*

The Apostle then refers to his own example, an indication that this verse is not only a prayer but also a practical exhortation to them. It also highlights how the Apostle and the brethren with him powerfully modelled the behaviour he now prays for them to demonstrate.

**In John Chapter 13 and at verses 34 & 35**

*“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”*.”

Each of us has a personal responsibility to encourage one another to so excel in love brethren and sisters. This is a powerful point of exhortation for us all to remember in that it highlights for us how the examples of our own personal lives either support or detract from the message we personally proclaim.

For times of persecution and suffering can become times of selfishness. Persecuted people often become very self-centred and demanding. Nothing reveals the true inner man like the furnace of affliction. Some people build walls in times of trial and shut themselves off. Others build bridges and draw closer to one another. The question comes my dear brethren and sisters, *are we each personally wall or bridge builders?*

It is extremely comforting to know that this aspect of the Apostle’s prayer for these brethren and sisters at Thessalonica was indeed granted in the mercy of our Heavenly Father.

**For in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians Chapter 1 and at verses 3 & 4**

*“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the ecclesias of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure”*

Brethren and sisters as we move into the final petition of the prayer we find that this love the Thessalonians were to abound in, is the very basis for the holiness the Apostle now goes onto pray for them.

**Verse 13**

*“To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”*

Now verse thirteen begins with “*to the end, so that*” which introduces it as a result clause. Although this is a further request by the Apostle, it is one, which is also a result of the preceding request. The word “*end*” at the beginning of the verse, is the same word translated three times in verse twelve as “*towards*”. This Greek term “*eis*” indicates motion towards an objective with the goal of reaching or touching it.

Love & holiness are intimately intertwined brethren and sisters if there is a lack of love then there is a corresponding lack of holiness in our lives. Therefore love is the essence of holiness that is why this increase in love sets the way for personal holiness to develop.

Let us think about this for a moment, it is our reverence and love for our Heavenly Father that aids us in not sinning against him, except through weakness. Likewise it is our love for one another that compels us to manifest a faithful walk, so as not to become a stumbling lock to one another. Love then is the motivational power that drives the development of holiness in our lives. This was powerfully evident in the life of the one we are shortly to remember brethren and sisters.

Thus we read here then that our Lord and master is currently working towards developing two things in each one of us. Firstly to have our “*hearts established*” and to secondly that our hearts become “*unblameable in holiness*”.

The word “*establish*” means “*to set fast, to make firm*”, the idea here is of being so sure that nothing will cause you to waver.

Now **notice carefully** brethren that it is their and our “*hearts*” that need to be established. Although the heart is a symbol of our whole life now, here the heart I believe is restricted to the action of our conscience.

**1<sup>st</sup> John Chapter 3 and verses 18 – 21**

*“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and **shall assure our hearts before him**. For **if our heart condemn us**, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”*

Our Heart here stands then for our biblically instructed conscience. Yet we must remember that because our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. It cannot be alone a faithful indicator of our status before our Heavenly Father. After all, we all have such difficulty discerning the motives for our actions, our consciences although biblically instructed are therefore not infallible. Indeed we should take note of our biblically instructed consciences, it is a tool to aid us in the fight against sin, but the point here is, it is not the final arbiter, as we sit here today examining ourselves.

It is therefore tremendously comforting then that our Heavenly Father and our beloved Master now know our hearts and understand all things. They are not caught out or deceived by them, thus we can trust in their righteous judgement.

Thus we need our hearts to be assured, stable and secure in our Heavenly Fathers love brethren and sisters. Otherwise our hearts will constantly condemn us and that condemnation will in turn paralyse our faith and cease our necessary developing overflowing love and holiness.

To render us “*unblameable in holiness*” is the Master’s ongoing sanctifying work in each of our lives now, as He seeks to remove all spots, wrinkles and blemishes from our characters. “*Unblameable*” here means, “*to have no censure against them, to be accounted free from fault*”. Now let us be clear here brethren to be “*blameless*” is not the same as being sinless, as our Lord was, but rather it is to have no valid charge that can be laid at ones feet.

This **holiness** here then is not speaking of the process of becoming holy, but rather of its final quality or standard “*before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord*”

*Jesus Christ with all his saints*". This is indicated to us by the term "*in holiness*", which speaks of it as a state of "*rest and continuance*". This state will be confirmed at the judgement seat when those who have worked with the Father and the Master to develop this quality, will have their **set apart** character immortalised.

So that they finally will be like unto their Lord, for which they long. Thus the judgement seat in this prayer is presented not as a place of fear and foreboding, but of triumph and glory. **Notice** the repetition of the term "*our father*", which again is meant to reassure these brethren and sisters and us.

Here we see how the Apostle crafts their immediate needs in this prayer intertwining them with the ultimate purpose and end in mind. For as our Heavenly Father originated these, twin processes of redemption and God manifestation in his Son and now works along with him to secure their end. Although, He is our judge, there is no prosecutor, except, as we saw earlier only our own hearts.

#### **Romans Chapter 8 and verses 31 - 35**

*"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"*

Now as we come them to partake of bread and wine, let us reflect upon all that has been done for us brethren and sister accomplished in the sacrifice of our Lord. Indeed also let us remember that which, continues to be done day by day for us, as symbolised in the emblems before us upon the table. If you recall at the start of our remarks we asked the following question concerning how shall each of us finish, when we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, will we finish well?

Let each one of us so resolve as we see in this bread to understand the word of life, so that our hearts become firmly established in the love of our God for us. Likewise let each of us decide to be fellow labourers with the Father, our Lord and indeed one another in abounding in love towards one another. As is clearly symbolised in the wine, which symbolises the pouring out of ones life in service.

Finally let us end with these words from the second of these wish prayers in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians from chapter five.

**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Chapter 5 and verses 23 - 24**

*“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.”*