

1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13 "May The Lord Cause You To Increase And Abound In Love"

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 ¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; ¹² and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you; ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Paul's love for the Thessalonians is only exceeded by God's love for these same people, in Christ. And as Paul begins to come to the end of this letter he encourages them to look to the only One who can take the gift of salvation and have it manifest itself in a way that demonstrates the true love that only Christ can produce in the lives of His people.

In the opening of verse 11 Paul continues to pray to the Lord for the opportunity to physically visit these Christians in Thessalonica as he says, "Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;"

Notice how both the Father and Jesus are placed in the same sentence and tied to the same action of directing Paul to these people. In essence, Paul is saying that the end result of being in the presence of these Thessalonians can only be accomplished by God. And this God is identified in both the Father and the Son.

This doesn't exclude the Holy Spirit. In fact, it was earlier in this letter where Paul made it clear who was responsible for bringing these people to a saving faith, and the love of Christ, which resulted in the mutual agape love both Paul and these Thessalonians had for each other; and it was none other than God, the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-5 ² We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention *of you* in our prayers; ³ constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you; ⁵ ***for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;*** just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

In the context of worshipping God and exercising the gifts of the Spirit, in this very letter, we see the command to humble ourselves before the Spirit of God who gives these gifts.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-20 ¹⁶ Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ *Do not quench the Spirit*; ²⁰ do not despise prophetic utterances.

The Spirit, along with the Son and the Father are all placed in a unique position to one another and to us; that of God.

And so, when Paul addresses the Thessalonians all throughout this letter he assumes these people understand who this God is; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Three separate persons; one God.

This is the same God Paul writes about to the Corinthians, Ephesians and Timothy.

1 Corinthians 8:6 ⁶ yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.

Ephesians 4:4-6 ⁴ *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 ⁵ For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.

So, when we speak of one God, we are speaking of one God in three distinct persons and this was widely understood among believing Jews and Greeks very early on in the history of the Church and of course was revealed, though veiled, in a variety of places in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Genesis 1:26-27 ²⁶ Then God said, "*Let Us* make man in *Our image*, according to *Our likeness*; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

And so, when Paul says, ¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; he is acknowledging that

if anyone could make the way for him to get back to the Thessalonians, it would be God Himself, if that is what God willed.

But then Paul moves his attention immediately to the Thessalonians themselves and shows how the same God who can allow Paul to make his way back to these people is the same God who can cause these believers in Thessalonica to live out their faith in love.

1 Thessalonians 3:12 ¹² and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you;

The language here in Greek is instructive as we see that the Lord is the One able to cause a particular act in the lives of these people. The phrase, “cause you to increase,” employs the Greek word, *pleonazo* and means to super abound.

And so, Paul is praying to the Lord that He do a work in the lives of these people that only God can do, and that is to super abound a love in the hearts of these people that will result in agape love toward one another and also toward all people. And Paul says that this is the same super abounding love that he has for them.

And though we could walk away with the idea that both Paul and the Thessalonians are able to love one another in this most amazing way, the attention should really be focused on the only One who can provide and instill this love and that is the Creator God who has given them this love in His Son as the Spirit accomplishes this in each and every one of these Thessalonians.

We love, only because He first loved us. (1John 4:19). And so, when we talk about Christians loving one another and the world with the truth of God’s word, we are acknowledging that we possess a gift that was not there prior to God coming to us with His saving faith through His Son.

And this is what Paul meant when writing to the Galatians.

Galatians 4:9 ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

Here Paul corrects the order in which this relationship was started when he says that “you have come to know God,” which in the

context here is describing an establishment of a relationship with God. And we certainly come to know God when we come to Him in faith. But then Paul immediately places the emphasis on how this relationship was possible when he abruptly adds, “or rather to be known by God.”

And by this, Paul means to correct the first statement by replacing it with the second as he shows clearly that God made the first move to come to us and reveal Himself to us as He gave us the faith, through the regenerating work of the Spirit, to respond as we then came to know Him.

But, even though God gives this super abounding love, we must walk in that love by faith or find ourselves falling into the trap that Paul points out to the Galatians in the passage just quoted, “how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?”

Being enabled by God to have a super abounding agape love for each other and the world does not negate the fact that we can insert our sinful wills into the equation and place that love to the side in favor of selfish desires. And this is why Paul, later in this letter to the Thessalonians, says not to quench the Spirit.

You and I, in Christ, have an amazing gift from God as we have been united to Christ by faith. We have been given the Spirit of the Lord and the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts. But, in having this love we are told to employ this love, which is to say, that in Christ, we have the ability to choose the things of the Lord and must move towards the things of God as we seek the things above.

And in doing so, our love for the brethren will demonstrate itself in tangible ways, like encouraging each other in Christ, promoting and teaching the truth of God’s word as we disciple others, meeting the needs of other believers, physically and spiritually, praying for each other and coming along side each other to reprove, correct and train in righteousness.

And in this letter to the Thessalonians Paul takes heart in the fact that he sees these people doing just that as they and he love one another in the power of the Spirit. This is the ideal situation for every believer and we are to take this love of God and share it with the family of God, but as we are told in our text, we are also to share it with all people.

There is a tendency today to think of church as our “special club” where we can get together for fellowship, be fed spiritually, and be at ease in our spiritual environment. And while it is true that fellowship is important along with being fed spiritually as we enjoy other brothers and sisters in Christ, the mission of the church is to be “equipped” to go out to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And the only way we will accomplish this task with any zeal is if we love the world with the love that Christ gave us. And by the way, loving the world does not mean compromising with the world. During Christ’s earthly ministry He continually came into contact with the world, but He never compromised His holiness nor the truth of His word.

And so, whether it was the Samaritan woman at the well, or the Pharisees who tried to trick him with what they viewed as clever questions to trip our Lord up, He always took them back to the truth of who He was and what must be done to come into a relationship with the living God through faith in the Messiah.

And so, loving the world must first and foremost be an attitude where we are willing to warn them of the impending danger if they reject the Messiah, and then to lead them to that One who came to die for the penalty of the sins of His people, as we encourage all people to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sin and a future resurrection hope found in our resurrected Savior.

We don’t have to come up with a market strategy to accomplish this. And no, we don’t have to make our churches “world friendly” to attract them to the Savior. In fact, there is nothing attractive about Jesus Christ to the world.

1 Corinthians 1:18-24 ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to

Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Notice that Paul says, that the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. Well, who are those who are perishing? The world. So, if we are to love the world how does this square with giving them the gospel if it is foolishness to them?

Notice the rest of what Paul says in that passage. “But to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Who is the “us” in that verse? We who were part of the world that thought the word of the cross was foolishness, but through the power of God the Holy Spirit, He opened our eyes to the truth as He took us from darkness to light and gave us a faith that enabled us to reach out to Him with thankfulness.

All of the “us” were at one time the “them” of the world. This is why we love the world as we take the truth of the Messiah to all the world. It is not our job to save anyone but to simply give the message of hope to all, in love, as God saves His people through the agency of the Holy Spirit coupled with His word.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And you and I in Christ have been given that privilege and responsibility to be Christ’s ambassadors in this world.

This is why we don’t have to cater to the world to trick them into our churches so that at some later point we can manipulate them into an environment where they will be “ready” to receive Christ. No one is ready to receive Christ until the Spirit of Christ makes them ready.

This doesn’t mean we have to insult the world or be rude in the way we present the gospel. But, it must be noted that even if you give the world the message of hope in love, many times they will still be offended or insulted and will view Christians as narrow minded bigots.

That’s fine. That attitude just confirms what we’ve been saying. The word of the cross is foolishness to the world, those who are perishing. Love them with the love of Christ as you love them with the truth of Christ and let the Holy Spirit do the work of saving. Our job is to be the messengers, God’s job is to be the Messiah who saves His people from their sins.

As Paul closes this section he is going to remind them to what end this love of Christ is to be viewed and appreciated.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Keep in mind that Paul has already told these Thessalonians that there will be a day when he and they will stand before the Lord and that the fruit of Paul's ministry in that day will be shown in these very Thessalonian believers as the crown or glory of Paul's ministry.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 ¹⁹ For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

In both 1Thessalonians 2:19 and 1Thessalonians 3:13 the emphasis is upon the return of Jesus Christ, what Paul refers to as Jesus Christ's coming. In fact, this is part of the theme of this entire letter, which is to say, that Paul wants these Thessalonians to live in the light of the future coming of Jesus Christ and to draw encouragement from the fact that this will be a reality that they must acknowledge to be able to live in the joy of their present salvation.

We'll see this in both the fourth and fifth chapters of this letter.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 ^{NAU} Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

It is in the light of this sure coming of Jesus Christ that Paul encourages these believers to live lives worthy of the calling to which they've been called. And this is why he ends chapter 3 by praying for them to the end that God would establish their hearts

without blame in holiness before our God and Father when Jesus Christ returns with all His saints.

In other words, he's praying that the agape love that God has filled their hearts with, both for fellow believers and the world, along with Paul himself, would continue to grow each day right up until the day of Christ's return; what we might call the perseverance of the saints.

This is a work that only God can do and will do for His people until He raises them up on the last day. And it is this last day that Paul has in mind.

We've touched on this before, but it's worth noting again here, that this last day will be a very busy day for the Lord of heaven and earth.

It is, as we just mentioned, the very day in which Christ raises all of His people from the grave.

John 6:39,44 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

There will be no secret rapture, all who are in the grave and all who are alive at His coming will be raised up on the "last day."

But there will be judgment of the entire world on this very same day, sometimes referred to as the Great Day of the Lord.

Zephaniah 1:14-16 ¹⁴ Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers.

Jude 1:6 ⁶ And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day,

Revelation 6:15-17 ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who

sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Jesus Himself acknowledges that this great day of God's wrath will take place on the last day.

John 12:48 ⁴⁸ "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

And so, on the last day, the day of the Lord, the Great Day, we have the resurrection of those in the grave, the rapture of those who are alive at Christ's coming, the judgment of the world in God's wrath. But we also have the very end of the universe as we know it.

Not an annihilation of the universe, but a transformation of it through fire on this last day.

2 Peter 3:7 ⁷ But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

2 Peter 3:12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

The world likes to mock Christians about Christ coming back in judgment. They treat this like we're propping up some boogey man to scare everyone into believing in a God who actually judges. In fact, Peter reminds the church that this attitude has been going on for a long time.

2 Peter 3:3-4 ³ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

But then Peter reminds his readers that Christ's second coming in judgment is no empty threat as he directs their attention to the first global judgment that God promised because of the sinfulness of men.

2 Peter 3:5-6 ⁵ For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, ⁶ through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

Can you say, Noah's flood?

Yes, God is serious about Him finally dealing with sinful men once and for all on the last day as He raises His people to life, as He judges the world, as He destroys the present heavens and present earth with fire.

But there's one more thing that happens on the last day that is really the culmination of what it means to wrap up redemptive history. In fact, it is this very thing that Adam and Eve longed for along with all the prophets of old and Paul himself.

Paul calls it the hope of Israel, the blessed hope as he explained it to King Agrippa.

^{NAU} **Acts 26:6** "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; ⁷ *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. ⁸ "Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?

There it is, the hope of the Israel of God, the resurrection. But what Paul infers in this must not be overlooked because it doesn't end with a resurrection. A resurrection assumes a resurrection of a body, the same body that was placed in the ground corruptible that will be raised incorruptible. Paul put it this way.

1 Corinthians 15:41-43 ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. ⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

But this begs the question; raised to what end? To float around in a non-material world? Not at all. In fact, because there is a physical resurrection of God's people it assumes a physical restoration of paradise lost in the Garden of Eden, again something that Adam

and Eve longed to return to, and will one day. In fact, this will happen on the last day.

Because on the last day there will be a restoration of all things where both this world and the heavens, (another description of the universe that God created), will be purged with the fire of God's judgment to remove the curse of sin from all creation.

Paul addressed this when writing to the Romans and this is his description of what the hope of the Israel of God ultimately leads to in the resurrection.

Romans 8:18-22 ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

When Paul speaks of the whole creation groaning and suffering the pains of childbirth he is talking about the end of the age when the entire creation is finally birthed into something new as it is delivered from the curse that God placed on the universe because of man's sin.

And just as the children of God are delivered into the freedom of the glory of God found in the resurrection, so too, the creation will be delivered into the same hope of glory without the curse. This too, will happen on the last day and Peter elaborates on it in his second letter.

2 Peter 3:10-14 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,

This is what every believer should long for and that is the ushering in of the Kingdom of God that was promised from ages past; a Kingdom where God's people are raised up to rule and reign with Christ on the new earth forever and ever.

Both Peter and Paul frame this coming in such a way as to remind their readers that in light of the coming day of Christ what sort of people ought you to be?

This is why Paul says in our text, **1 Thessalonians 3:13** ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

We are called to holiness as we long for that day of glory where we will be transferred into a kingdom in which righteousness dwells. If we know this then we should long for that day and as we do we will live in the light of that truth and desire to please the One who has called us to Himself with the promise to be with Him in His kingdom forever. And this kingdom will be awesome with the Lamb upon His throne.

The end of God's book sums it up best.

Revelation 21:1-7 ^{NAU} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶ Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷ "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

Live as sons and daughters of the living God and long for that day when Christ returns and makes all things right. Live for that day today and rejoice and be comforted as Paul encourages these

Thessalonians later in this same letter and of which we will spend a good deal of time discussing. But we'll end with this.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.