

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Giving Thanks and Honor For Growing Faith and Love

By Dan Trygg

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; ⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.”

2 Thessalonians 1:2-4

“To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

There is so much to learn about *agapē*-love from the apostle Paul. He had some very definite, developed thoughts about it. We have seen that **it was the goal of his instruction**, i.e., it was the outcome he wanted to produce in the lives of those he worked with (1 Tim. 1:5). He clearly taught that **it came from the Holy Spirit**, who was imparted to every believer when they were justified by faith in Christ (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22). **He prayed for it** to be established in their experience, **and encouraged them to pursue it** (Eph. 3:14-21; 1 Cor. 14:1; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). He called it the “more excellent way”, and taught them that even **their *agapē*-walk can grow, mature and become more effective as they experiment** and try different things (1 Cor. 12:31; Phil. 1:9,10). At the same time, he also clearly taught that **God would willingly teach them** how to *agapē*-love one another (1 Thess. 4:9,10). **He was looking for it to rise up within them and overflow abundantly in their hearts and actions** toward each other and all people (1 Thess. 3:12,13). AND, as we see here in 2 Thessalonians, **he was quick to point out their growth** in this important area, **and praise God for His working within them** to deepen this aspect of their lives.

After the salutation, Paul begins this letter by saying, “We are obligated to thank God always for you, since He is worthy, because your faith increases immeasurably and the love of each one of y’all greatly abounds unto one another.” **The health and incredible growth of both their faith and their *agapē*-love was unusual and amazing, ... and Paul attributed that to God’s special working. For that reason, it was important to acknowledge this by giving Him praise and thanksgiving, ...in fact, Paul states it *more strongly* than that.** He describes it as *a debt or obligation*. The principle is that **when we see God’s unusual activity on our behalf, the proper response, ...the necessary response..., is to give Him thanks for what He has done or is doing.** This goes back to a fundamental principle of relationship with God, described in 1 Samuel 2:30, “those who honor Me, I will honor; and those who think-little of Me, I will think-little of them.” If we value what God is doing, or has done for us, we are to respond to that with thanks and praise. **To NOT show appreciation is to dis-regard Him, to treat Him as of no account, and to think-little of Him and His blessings.** According to 1 Samuel 2:30, when we treat God with dis-regard, He will also dis-regard us. Do you want more of God’s activity in your life? Then **be quick to acknowledge and appreciate whenever you see Him at work. Bless Him for His blessings. When you value Him, He will value you, ...and He is more likely to desire to respond to the longings and cries of your heart, especially when they have to do with Him.**

Next, Paul applies the same principle to them. He honors them, by telling of their victories to other people. You see, it was not just about the working of God in them, ...it was also about them working with God. There was a necessary partnership going on here. Not only was God working in them, but they were also making themselves available to Him, ...to do His will. Paul appreciated them for their faithfulness, and bragged on them to others. **He thought highly of them, and could not help but speak of them to others.** He not only spoke of it in generalities, but in specifics. He spoke of their endurance and faith (faithfulness) in the face of the persecutions and afflictions they encountered. **As he told their stories, it became evident that God was at work in and with them to give them the ability to persevere.** Thus, Paul and his listeners were obligated and motivated to *give thanks and praise* for what God was doing with them. **Once again, the focus turned back again to God, and giving Him thanksgiving and praise.**

Paul then pointed out that God will bring judgment on those who did not know or acknowledge Him, and did not obey the good news concerning Jesus Christ. **Jesus is coming back, and on that day, those who rejected Him will be rejected and exiled away from His presence forever.** On that day, **He will also come to be glorified by and marveled at by His holy people**, who responded to the good news with faith and obedience. **Again, we see the same principle played out: those who rejected Him will be rejected, and those who honored Him will be honored with Him.**

In light of this overarching plan and spiritual principle, Paul continually prayed that God would make-them-worthy of this eternal calling and fulfill every positive-desire for goodness and work of faith with power in order that the name of our Lord Jesus might be glorified in y'all, ...and y'all in Him..., according to God's grace (vss. 11,12).

Here again, we see Paul's vision for prayer. He expected that his prayers would make a difference, so he repeatedly and diligently gave himself to intercede for the people of God. As you read through his letters, you see that this includes people he knew, and had led to Christ (like the Thessalonians), as well as people he only heard about, but had never seen face to face (like the Colossian Christians, or the believers in Rome).

What did Paul pray for?

He prayed that God would "worthify them". The word is a causative verb, but there is some dispute as to what it means. Does it mean that Paul was asking God to "count or consider them worthy" of the eternal Kingdom, as some suggest, ...or that He would actually "make them worthy" of His Kingdom? If they were already Christians, they were already "justified" or "counted-as-righteous". In that legal sense, they already were "counted-worthy" of the Kingdom. Why would Paul continually pray for something that was already theirs in Christ? No, **I think Paul is praying that God would "make them worthy" in that He would grow them up to their full stature in Christ. He would grow them up into their calling. This is meant to be an experiential reality.** There is an eternal certainty, but there is also a temporal realization which we can experience in this life.

The phrase also says that "He might-make-them-worthy of the calling". What is this "calling"? In some passages, it seems to be like a job or vocation that we are "called" to do (Rom. 11:29; 2 Tim. 1:9-12). In other passages, it sounds almost like our life circumstances (1 Cor. 1:26; 7:20), a destiny, or maybe an inheritance (Phil. 3:14; Eph. 4:1-4). Maybe it is all of these things. Maybe because we are "called" to a new identity and destiny as citizens of God's Kingdom, there is a manner of living that we are "called" to embrace and exemplify. Maybe this "heavenly calling" refers to our heavenly inheritance, ...or it could refer to a heavenly commission (Heb. 3:1). Could it be that Paul is saying that it is possible to walk in the power, privilege, responsibility and intimacy with God NOW? Could it be that this is what Paul is thinking when he prays that God may make-us-worthy of the calling, ...that we would grow into understanding and operating in the spiritual power and character that we are "called to"?

Notice the next part: "and He might fulfill every positive-desire for goodness and work of faith with power". There are a couple of key observations to make about this part of the verse.

(1.) **There can be no doubt that this part of the verse is talking about life in the here and now.** Paul is praying about our fulfilling desires and actions which take place *in this life*.

Note the focus and expanse of the verse: ...that God might fulfill every positive-desire for benevolent-action and work-produced-by-faith. (2.) **The initiative is originating within us,** ...a positive-desire to do a good thing, ...or a faith-produced action (something inspired by faith).

(3.) **Paul is praying that God would fulfill or complete these internally-inspired desires or visionary insights, ...and that He would do it in power or ability from Him.** Paul is specifically asking for the working of God, ...that a more-than-natural ability might be made evident in the working out of these "desires for beneficial-acts". Again, the partnership with God is evident. He works in us, and we work-together-with Him to accomplish these good works in the world.

Why is this important? "...so that the name of the Lord Jesus might be glorified in you." (4.) The purpose of all this, is so that Jesus would be glorified. We come back to the teaching of Jesus, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see *your* good works, and glorify *your* Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16), ...only here it is Jesus who will receive glory through their actions. People will honor and thank *God* for the benevolent actions of *His people*. Peter expresses the same principle in 1 Peter 2:12, "Keep your behavior excellent, ...so that, as they observe *your* good deeds, they will glorify *God*...". This is all the more heightened, when it is evident that there is something more than natural going on, ...some powerful action or work of God being displayed.

But it doesn't stop there! (5.) **Not only is Jesus to be glorified in them, but they are to be glorified in Him.** Not only will Christ be praised, but they themselves will be valued and esteemed for the good works they have done.

Once again, we come back to the principle of reciprocating honor. *As they honored God* by pursuing Him, *He honored them* by revealing His will and infusing them with His power. *As they honored Him* by responding to His inworking, ...by putting obedience behind their insights and the inner motivations of His Spirit..., *He honored them* by giving them more ability to understand and perceive His leading, and more ability to follow through on His will. *As they continued to honor Him* by their persistence in obedience, *this divine-human partnership accomplished practical acts of goodness which were seen by outsiders.* These outsiders were grateful, and they *blessed God*, and also *blessed them* for their acts of service. In this process the faith of God's people was enlarged, their love for one another grew and deepened, **Jesus was lifted up, and they, too, were praised for their faithful obedience.**