

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Plea to Pray for Pastors

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28

Code: 52-36

I recently had a conversation with a friend and he said, "Did you read my letter?" We were talking about a certain matter and I said, "Yes, I did." He said, "Well, then you know such and such and such and such to be true." I said, "Well now wait a minute, I don't remember reading that." To which he replied, "Well did you read the PS at the end of the letter?" And I had to confess, "No, I don't think I did." I had skipped over the PS and he said, "Well that was the most important part."

It's a good lesson for me not to skip a PS and a good reminder of what we're going to look at in our text this morning. Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. We're going to look at the PS, the postscript to 1 Thessalonians, verses 25 through 28, four brief verses that sum up Paul's final thoughts, his personal postscript to the letter, a final collection of concerns that sum up his parting desires.

First Thessalonians 5:25, "Brethren, pray for us, greet all the brethren with a holy kiss, I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

Now there really is no way to mistake the meaning of these verses. They're simple, direct, and rich. They have, however, an application to us that pulls us in for a closer look. It would be easy to just sort of cursorily read through them and say, "Well, I understand that," and move on and miss the tremendously beneficial application that they can have to our own hearts. Usually we would skim by something like this in a personal letter, even in a Bible book because we feel we've digested the main message and so this gets only a parting brief glance. But we never want to do that with an inspired letter. You never want to do that in a letter from a friend or really from anyone because that final word may be very very important, something essential left out, and you certainly never want to do that in a Bible book because these words, just as much as the core of the epistle itself, were inspired by God.

Now in these final four statements there are three closing requests and then a benediction...three closing requests. And they call us to attention because they identify some priorities for us as a church. Now remember, this whole section of Thessalonians starting in chapter 5 and verse 12, has been on the theme of growing a healthy flock. And the PS here in these final verses is really a part of that theme though it's set apart as a different subject, in a sense, a summation of the last desires of his heart, it fits in perfectly. Here are three final elements necessary to grow a healthy flock...three parting desires for the Thessalonians and for all believers.

We're going to look at those three majoring on the first one, and you'll know why by the time the service is over this morning. The first parting desire we could sum up with this simple statement...it says, "Brethren, pray for us." Point one, pray for your pastors...pray for your pastors. That is what is on the Apostle Paul's heart. He uses the term "brethren," and by the way, it's in the emphatic position in this sentence which is quite unusual, but again it shows us his affection for them. It also identifies the readers as fellow Christians and true children of God, as he said they were back in chapter 1 verse 4. So in a sense he began by identifying them as genuine believers and he ends by identifying them as genuine believers. It is an unqualified brethren, that is it leaves no one out, he is talking to everyone in the church who has committed their life to Jesus Christ. The basis of his commands then is founded on the brotherhood. It is because we are brothers, it is because we are linked together he says that I want you to pray for us. That's the foundation of this request.

Now you will remember that Paul had begun this epistle by telling them he constantly prayed for them. Verse 2 of chapter 1, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers." He continually prayed for them. And now at the end he turns the table and says I want you to pray for us. The "us" here has in mind not only Paul, but also Silvanus, another name for Silas, and Timothy. You remember back in Acts 6:4 it says that the minister, the pastor, the leader of the church is to give himself continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word, and that prayer focuses on the needs of his people. Paul was faithful to that, so was Silas and Timothy and they had unhesitatingly and unceasingly prayed for the Thessalonians and now he was asking that they would do the same.

Some manuscripts, by the way, add the word "also" so that it would read, "Brethren, also pray for us," and in that sense it could tie in with what he said back in verse 17, pray without ceasing and in your unceasing prayer also include us. Or it could tie in with verse 23 where he is definitely praying for them, "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely," and he is simply saying, "As I have prayed for you, you also pray for us." We aren't sure that the "also" belongs, it is in some manuscripts but not all. The point is nonetheless the same, he is saying you need to pray for those who are over you as your spiritual leaders. The word "pray" is in the present tense, it's a continual pattern, constant prayer.

Now here Paul is saying we are dependent on this, on the prayers of believers. This, by the way, is a common plea on his part. We find it in a number of places in the New Testament. In fact, if you study the epistles, the thirteen epistles that Paul wrote, it is the pattern of Paul to open his epistles with the assurance that he is praying for the church and to close the epistle by asking the church to pray for him. This reciprocal mutual intercession was vital. He sought it and he valued the prayers of his people. Clay Cooper wrote, "Paul knew of no faster way to get the gospel through enemy lines than by recruiting Christian converts in to the service of prayer, he depended on it as his basic weapon," end quote. One commentator by the name of Alfred Plummer(?) makes an interesting observation

that Paul's request for prayer for himself points out the difference between Paul and Christ. The Apostle Paul prays for himself, writes Plummer, and for his disciples and he charges them to pray for themselves and for others and in particular for himself. Christ prays for Himself and for His disciples and He charges them to pray for themselves and others, but He never asks them to pray for Him. Paul is not Christ. Christ doesn't need the prayers of His people. Christ has no imperfections. He lacks nothing. He needs nothing. Therefore He does not ask that we pray for Him, Paul does...Jesus is God, Paul is man. And Paul is like us and Paul needed the prayers of his people. I think we tend to think that he was somewhat invincible, unflappable, that he couldn't be disturbed, that he was sort of omni-competent, but that's not the case. He had weak flesh. He had limitations of his own capabilities and his own knowledge. There was much opposition from formidable enemies set against him and he continually calls on people to intercede for him. Now any of us, myself included as a pastor, who compares himself with the Apostle Paul would come up woefully short, which is a good reminder that if the Apostle Paul felt so desperately the need for the prayers of his people, how much more desperately do I need those prayers and do others like me?

Now this is a very serious matter, not to be treated lightly, this praying for your pastor. Look at Romans chapter 15 for a moment and I want to show you verse 30 because I think it elucidates this a bit, enriching it for us. In verse 30 of Romans 15 Paul says, "Now I urge you, brethren," and here he comes to the close of this epistle as his pattern is, he told them he was praying for them at the beginning, he now he calls on them to pray for him, "I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." He is not at all reluctant to plead with them to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me. That is intense language. The word "to strive together," sunagonizomai, the word "agony" is in the middle of that word to agonize, sunis that compounding preposition that intensifies the verb. By the way, this same verb in John 18:36 is translated by the word "fighting...fighting." He's saying I want you to fight with me in your prayers, I want you to get in to the battle with me, realizing that our weapon is prayer. That's reminiscent, isn't it, of Paul's word to the Corinthians, but the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but spiritual. And one of them is prayer. Prayer is our weapon in the spiritual fight. And so it is that the Apostle Paul says I need you to be fighting with me in prayer to God for me.

We need to remember that prayer is battle, it wages war not against God but against the status quo, against sin and fallenness and the flesh and devils. Isaiah, for example, spoke of the man in prayer as the man who arouses himself to take hold of God, Isaiah 64:7. In Genesis you remember chapter 32 you find there Jacob fighting...fighting and wrestling with God until he is blessed. Colossians 2:1 speaks of Paul's great spiritual struggle on behalf of the Colossians, a struggle in prayer for them and others who had not seen him yet. In Colossians 4:12 Epaphras it says was always laboring fervently for you in his prayers and James 5:16 talks about the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man being productive. Even Jesus prayed and fasted for 40 days. So Paul says to the Romans you must pray for me with passionate fighting struggling zeal.

You say, "Well why is this necessary? Why isn't it only important just to tell God what's on your mind? Why get so worked up about it? Isn't God sovereign? Isn't He controlling everything? Isn't He doing all things according to the purpose of His own will?" That is true. God is sovereign. God is doing His will. But nonetheless we are called upon to a constant diligent zealous passionate battle in prayer, striving, agonizing together as a body in a fight against evil and the flesh and Satan and demons and the pervasive darkness that rules the world's system. This is no trivial matter. In Luke 11 Jesus said you must be persistent in your praying. Praying with zeal and praying with passion somehow fits in to the sovereign plan of God. How? I'm not sure, but He is. We are to pray then with that agonizing striving, rebelling against the corruption of this world in our prayers and not settling for the status quo. It is an act of rebellion against accepting as normal what is pervasively abnormal. It is a rebellion against the usurper and every agenda and every scheme and every interpretation and every deed and every word and every lie that is at odds with God. We literally storm the gates of heaven, as it were, crying out, "Thy will be done." We get under the altar with the saints in Revelation and we say, "How long, O Lord, how long before You act?"

Even our Lord Jesus, though He knew well the sovereignty of God never accepted the status quo with passive resignation. He rebelled against the spiritual corruption of the Jews. He rebelled against the power of sin to cripple and kill. He rebelled against the sinfulness that came upon Him at the cross, against its power to take His life, against the necessity to barrier its penalty and He cried out sweating great drops of blood, as it were. He rebelled against those things that violated the sanctity of God's holy universe. Sin and the pervasive fallenness that comes from it that permeates the system repulsed Jesus Christ and He prayed for and sought its defeat. And never did He resign Himself to some inevitable end.

And so, we are called upon, says Paul, to pray agonizingly on behalf of spiritual leaders...tapping the power of prayer for God's Kingdom sake and the ministry of those anointed and faithful servants who stand in the place of Jesus Christ as His agents, ambassadors, and spokesmen leading the battle against evil.

In 1810 there was a man born by the name of Gardener Spring. He died in 1872. He was the pastor of Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City. He wrote about this need to pray for those in spiritual leadership and to pray passionately and I'm going to share some of the things he wrote with you this morning. He said this, "We entreat the churches to regard with a more deliberate and devout mind the great work itself to which their ministers are devoted, to explain the doctrines and enforce the duties of genuine Christianity...this is our duty...to defend the truth against all the subtlety and the versatility of error, to sustain within their own minds that sense of God's presence and of those moral sanctions which are revealed in His Word, and to experience that deep and tender impression of the things that are unseen and eternal that are necessary to give earnestness to their preaching, as well as that consistent life and bearing that are necessary to give power to their preaching. And to do this

in a way that shall adapt itself to different times, places, occasions and characters and without being disheartened by difficulties, overwhelmed by enemies and weary of the yoke which they have taken upon themselves is no ordinary work. If a people are looking for rich sermons from their minister, their prayers must supply him with the needed material. If they seek for faithful sermons, their prayers must urge him by a full and uncompromising manifestation of the truth to commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. If God's people are going to expect powerful and successful sermons, their prayers must make him a blessing to the souls of men. Would they have him come to them in the fullness of the blessings of the gospel of peace with a pounding heart and a burning eye and a glowing tongue and with sermons bathed in tears and filled with prayer? If so, their prayers must urge him to pray and their tears inspire his thrilling heart with the strong yearnings of Christian affection. It is in their own closets that the people of God most effectively challenge their beloved ministers to take heed to the ministry they have received from the Lord Jesus."

Rich words. He then went on to warn, he wrote this, "O, it is at a fearful expense that ministers are ever allowed to enter the pulpit without being preceded, accompanied and followed by the earnest prayers of the church. It is no marvel that the pulpit is so powerless and ministers so often disheartened when there are so few to hold up their hands. The consequence of neglecting this duty is seen and felt in the spiritual declension of the churches and it will be seen and felt in the everlasting perdition of men while the consequence of regarding it would be the in-gathering of multitudes into the Kingdom of God and new glories to the Lamb that was slain," end quote.

A serious duty to pray for your pastor. Now in praying for us, as Paul says, what special requests do we ask? Let me give you some. Number one, it is suggested in Scripture that you pray for your pastor's safety, that you pray for your pastor's safety. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 1, "Finally, brethren, pray for us," Paul says, "that the Word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified just as it did also with you and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men for not all have faith." It is important to pray for the safety of the pastor. Perverse is a word that mean outrageously wicked. We need to be delivered, that word by the way means rescued. They seek to harm us. They seek to still our voice. You say how. Well it could be through the destruction of reputation. It could be through the destruction of the work itself by sowing seeds of discord, discontent, rebellion, revolution within the ministry. It could be by taking a life, actually harming physically or even killing the servant of the Lord. Paul says pray for us that we will be delivered from outrageously wicked unrighteous evil unbelieving people.

Go back now to Romans 15, the text that I read a moment or two ago, and I'll show you here another verse that says the same thing. Paul says, "Strive together with me in your prayers to God for me," then in verse 31, "that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea and that my service for Jerusalem..." and he goes on. I need to be delivered from the disobedient in Judea. The word "disobedient" here means unregenerate. They don't obey God. They obey not God. They are not believers, they're disobedient. The word "delivered" here again is the word rhuomai which means

rescued. Pray that I will be rescued from the unbelieving Jews who are hostile to the gospel. At this point he didn't know what they would do. Later on he found out they were going to put him in chains and imprison him because the prophet Agabus told him that. But he knew they were lying in wait plotting to kill him. So he says pray for me that I will be rescued from unbelieving Jews hostile to the gospel. I don't know what they're going to do but I can predict they're going to do something. He was hated for renouncing the emptiness and hypocrisy of Judaism. He was hated for proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Messiah and as God. He was hated for practicing the equality of Jew and Gentile in Christ. He was hated for preaching new covenant freedom as over against old covenant ceremony. He was hated because he stirred up the animosity of people when he confronted their sinfulness and their lostness and he told sinners the convicting truth about their ultimate damnation. As a result of all of this they hated him. They had evil plans for him. He had accumulated enemies from years back and all through his life he accumulated enemies. And that kind of hatred dies very hard when it is fed by the underworld of demons and Satan who also want the end of this Apostle. He was beaten up everywhere he went. And this animosity developed and developed and developed until it was like a subterranean volcano that finally blew and his life was taken away. So the Bible says pray for the safety of your pastors. What that indicates is that your pastor by preaching the truth of God in every climate in any culture and in any place will put himself in jeopardy because to speak the truth is to confront the wicked system.

Secondly, we are also asking that you pray for our wisdom...wisdom in service. In the same text please note verse 31 again, he says, "Pray that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints." Paul had come up with a plan. The plan was he wanted to conciliate the Jewish believers in Jerusalem with the Gentile believers but he knew the barriers there were immense. And so he developed a plan and it was this, there were many poor believers in Jerusalem, many of them nearly destitute except for the provision that other Christians gave them, they had nothing of their own. And so he thought the greatest way to conciliate would be to go through all of the Gentile churches and collect money, take that money back and give it to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Such an act would show those poor saints, those Jewish Christians who tended to be very racial in their feelings toward Gentiles that the Gentiles loved them and that the Gentiles had made tremendous sacrifice on their behalf and Paul saw that as a way to conciliate the factions in the church. And so he says in verse 31, "Pray for me, strive, agonize with God for me that my service, my ministry, my diakonia--not talking about his preaching now, he's not talking about his theology, he's not talking about his teaching, he's not thinking of that--my ministry, my leadership, my service might be done wisely that I might be a wise leader and a wise servant." Specifically as I noted he had in mind that project of conciliating the Jews and the Gentiles, collecting the money. But the picture is a little bigger. I need you to pray for my service to be effective. He hoped it would succeed but he wasn't sure. What he was really afraid of was that when he got to Jerusalem and gave the money to the Jewish Christians that they would think it was nothing more than a bribe and they would reject it, even though it took immense sacrifice. There was no guarantee the gift would be received. There was no guarantee that the Jews would have the same loving spirit in receiving it that the Gentiles did in giving

it. So here is just a simple illustration of what ministry is all about, it has to do with issues. It has to do with leadership decisions. It has to do with conflict resolution. It has to do with difficult matters in dealing with people's lives. It has to do with prejudices. It has to do with traditions. It has to do with coping with strong wills and ignorance. It has to do with opinions. It has to do with pride. It has to do with all these things and the servant of God must be wise in his service. It calls for prayer.

Thirdly, the third component that you want to have in your prayer as you pray for your pastors is that regarding direction...direction. We're always having to make choices about the future, choices about how we use our time. You might even call it priority. What am I going to do? To what do I give myself over the next month, week, five months, six months, a year, five years? How do I make choices? So in verse 32 look again at Romans 15, he says there's something else I want you to pray for, I want you to pray that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. I want you to pray for my future plans. My idea is I want to come and be with you, I need the rest and the refreshment that you would provide. I want to come in joy but I know I only can do what is the will of God. I want you to pray for my knowledge of God's will. I want you to pray that my plans will be consistent with God's plans. That's it.

Pray for my safety, he says. Pray for my service. And then pray for the direction of my life as I make choices about where I go and what I do. He had plans, everybody does. But he wanted them in the will of God. And so he asked for their prayers. You may think again as many would think about Paul that there's a certain transcendence about the servant of the Lord which means that his prayers are probably more effective than yours in your mind. I have people come to me all the time and I say, "I want YOU to pray for me, your prayers are more powerful than anybody else's." Why? What makes you believe that? That's not necessarily the case. Because I have a certain gift and calling doesn't make me more spiritual automatically. It's the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man that avails much, or righteous woman, and that doesn't necessarily reserve itself for someone in ministry. We need your prayers and your prayers on our behalf at the throne of God are essential.

By the way, the Lord answered yes to all three of those requests. He did make it safely to Jerusalem. Acts 20 tells us about that. He was received gladly, it was a warm and wonderful reception when he got there, and so his service was effective. And thirdly, he did make it to Rome and he was there in joy and he was refreshed in the will of God to be with them. Acts 22 to 28 tells that whole story. So he said pray for those matters, my safety, my wisdom, my direction. God heard and answered their prayers on his behalf.

Fourthly, there's another component that you must pray for and that is you must pray for our effectiveness in proclamation, you must pray for our effectiveness in proclamation. Ephesians 6 verse 19, Paul says pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak. You need to pray for your pastor's

effectiveness in proclamation.

Now remember, Paul was a prisoner when he wrote that. He didn't say, "Pray...pray for my ankles, they've been rubbed raw. They're bleeding from the shackles." He didn't say, "Pray for my healing." He didn't say, "Pray for my deliverance." He didn't say, "I'm being abused. Pray for my suffering to end." He didn't want prayer for those things, he said, "Pray for my boldness in speaking the Word of God." Chains were incidental, absolutely incidental.

Look at Colossians chapter 4, in verse 2 he says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving...and here's what to pray for...praying at the same time for us...what's the request?...that God may open up to us a door for the Word that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have also been in prison in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak." That's twice he said that. Pray for an open door for the Word and that when the door is open I speak it clearly and one other word, boldly. That's it. Pray for the door to open to preach and that when it opens I may speak as I ought to speak. How is that? Ephesians 6...boldly, Colossians 4...clearly...boldly and clearly.

Now go back again to 2 Thessalonians 3:1...2 Thessalonians 3:1, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the Word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified." What a great great pattern this is. Now follow his thought, right? In talking about this point of proclamation first he said pray that the door opens. What does that mean? Pray that I'll have an opportunity to speak. Secondly, when that opportunity presents itself pray that I will speak as I ought to speak. And how I ought to speak is boldly and clearly. And then the third component is when I have spoken in that opportunity boldly and clearly, pray that the Word may spread from there and be glorified. What is that? The right response, that men will honor it, they will glorify it by obeying it. The word "spread rapidly" literally in the Greek is the word to run. It's a track word. Pray that it will sprint and be honored by everybody who hears it.

Again back to Gardener Spring, he wrote, "We cannot convert a single soul. We press home the divine commands and they trample upon His authority. We press home His threatenings and they despise His justice. We speak tenderly of His promises, they heed not His faithfulness of His beloved Son and they tread Him under their feet, of His patience and long suffering but their impenitence and obstinacy are proof against them all. We reason and plead with them until the obstacles to their conversions seem to us to rise higher by every effort we make to overcome them. Until finally we sink in dejection and cry out, 'What mighty power can break these granite-like hearts, what omnipotent grasp can rescue these perishing men from everlasting burnings?' O you blood-bought churches, your ministers need your prayers for the exceeding greatness of that power which God worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead," end quote.

If we're going to raise the spiritually dead we need the power of prayer. So when you pray for your pastor pray for his safety, his wisdom, his direction and his proclamation. One more, number five,

pray for his spiritual strength...pray for his spiritual strength. And this is so general that it isn't even isolated, only to the pastor. But going back in to Ephesians chapter 6 we remind ourselves about the armor of the Christian and spiritual warfare. We learn in chapter 6 of Ephesians verse 12 that there's a struggle not against flesh and blood but against the rulers and the powers and the world forces of darkness and spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies and all of that. And we learn about the spiritual battle that goes on as the enemy Satan and his hellions, demons engage themselves to pollute the already weak human flesh and turn us away from spiritual strength and so finally coming down in to verse 18 he says this, "With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit and with this in view be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints and pray on my behalf." And then he links it up with proclamation. But it goes both ways. I need your prayers for spiritual strength as well as proclamation. I need you to pray for me. Pray for us that we may be kept from sin, that we may walk carefully not as fools but as wise redeeming the time. Pray for us that our hearts may be more devoted to God and our lives more impressive examples of the message we preach. Pray for us that we may be more completely furnished to all good works and that we may be victorious in all spiritual battles. Pray for us that we may put on the armor of God, that we may be more faithful and wise to win souls, that we may discipline our body and bring it in to subjection lest in preaching to others we would become disqualified. Pray for us.

You say, "This is a pretty strong plea." It is. But there's reason for it. Look at Hebrews 13:18...Hebrews 13:18, a final text to consider. The writer is not being egotistical here and he's not being arrogant but he says something very important. Hebrews 13:18, he says, "Pray for us for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things." What is he saying? He's saying pray for us because to the best of our knowledge we think we deserve it. Is that fair? That's what he's saying. We have a good conscience. What do you mean? Well there's nothing accusing us. There's nothing in our lives that accuses us. As far as I know he is saying we've ministered faithfully, not perfectly but faithfully. We not only need your prayers but we believe we've earned them. We believe we have a right before God to expect them. You see, what creates a clear conscience is a holy effort, spiritual faithfulness. And he says my conscience is clear, I'm not being accused, I've been as faithful as a man could be in his weakness and we have earned your prayers. This is so crucial to a healthy church to pray for a faithful man who faithfully has given himself to them.

So says Paul, pray for us...pray for us. Back in chapter 5 verse 12 he said, first of all, you have to appreciate us, you have to appreciate us. And secondly, verse 13, you have to love us. And if you appreciate us and if you love us, you'll pray for us. That's part of a healthy church.

Now, there's a second statement, verse 26, we need only to look at it very briefly. A second parting desire. The first one, pray for your pastors. The second one, share affection with each other...share affection with each other. He simply says, "Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss." The word "greet" is intended to be warm and friendly, not distant and cold. It was a common conclusion to send loving

thoughts to someone in a letter, when you wrote a letter you might end it this way, you might end it with some kind of greeting and very often it would even include this idea of a holy kiss. Romans 16:16, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." First Corinthians 16:20, "All the brethren greet you, greet one another with a holy kiss." Same basic statement. The end of 2 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 12, "Greet one another with a holy kiss, all the saints greet you." So it goes. Even Peter got in on it, not wanting to be left out, 1 Peter 5 verse 14, "Greet one another with a kiss of love."

Now he's saying greet all the brethren with a holy kiss, no one is to be left out. Even the troublesome ones, and there may have been some troublesome ones, certainly there were some faint hearted and some weak and some unruly, as identified in verse 14. Whoever received this letter, it would be the elders, would start the chain going, would start the process until the love of Christ through Paul was shared with everybody through a physical gesture called a holy kiss, a sign of affection. I want you to share your love demonstrably. Touch is very important. It speaks volumes. It carries tenderness. It carries affection. He's saying greet one another with a holy kiss, you elders that get this letter, and send it down through all the brethren and let the whole church experience my affection and the affection of each other. Chrysostom, the early father, said because being absent he couldn't greet them with a kiss, he greets them through others as when we say kiss him for me. The symbol of shared love here is a holy kiss. Ancient custom had people kissing the foot and the hand and the knee and even sometimes the elbow of a superior but kissed the cheek of a friend. This was not some liturgy, this wasn't some ceremony, this wasn't some ritual, this was spontaneous casual affection practiced man to man and woman to woman...where you would embrace and place a gentle kiss on the cheek. That's still prominent today in some cultures. As I told you when I went to Russia, they do it, only they do it on the mouth instead of the cheek. It's like a kiss brothers to brother, father to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, sister to sister, within a family. This is to teach Christians to reach out and demonstrate their love with tenderness.

They did love each other, the Thessalonians did. Back in chapter 1 verse 3 he says, "I know your labor of love..." chapter 3 verse 6 he says, "I've heard the good news of your faith and love..." chapter 4 verse 9 he says, "You don't even need anybody to teach you about it because you already have been taught by God to love one another." They were a loving group and he says now show it. He doesn't just say greet one another with a kiss, that could start a whole problem in the church. He puts the word "holy" in there which changes everything.

Now eventually this custom became abused. It's sad but in church history it became abused and by the thirteenth century in the church in the west it was totally abandoned because of its abuses. On the way to that thirteenth century kind of abandoning of it they tried to get it under control so they made it a part of liturgy and you can read in some of the older writings that they would insert a holy kiss somewhere between the final prayers in preparation for the Lord's table and the taking of the elements. They would have everybody turn around and give each other a liturgical kiss. That they

thought could at least fulfill the text, the habit of the text, and deal with the abuses that were coming up. There are some interesting writings about how these things were abused as men began to kiss women and call it a holy kiss when it was anything but that. Since the abandoning of such things in the western culture, coming down to today, we usually express our affection with a warm handshake, or a hug and there's been little bit of a movement back toward this kind of affectionate demonstration in more recent years. I don't really think that what you do is the issue as much as the touch of your flesh upon someone else which shows your kindness and tenderness, the gracious way in which you shake their hand or hug them or plant a kiss on the cheek or whatever, whatever the form might be Paul is saying I want you to share the love of Christ in a demonstrable way with each other. I want you to break down those barriers that rise up among people. That is important as well as praying for us.

There's a third statement in verse 27, a third parting desire. This is the third of this little trilogy, submit to the Word...submit to the Word. Pray for your pastors, share your love with each other and submit to the Word. This is very strong. "I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren." Now I don't have to say, do I, that they couldn't just run off copies for everybody? You do understand that that was not possible. There was no printing press. Everybody needed to hear this and not everybody could have their own copy, by any means. Furthermore, not everybody could read. Not everyone could read. Not many noble and not many mighty belonged to the church and many of those more ignoble people, did not know how to read. And so it was essential that it be read to them and that they listened to it. And so he commands that this is done. Why? Because it is the inspired word of God, one. Two, it is the direct divine answer out of heaven to the problems of their church. It is God's message and everybody needed to hear it and everybody needed to understand it. That's why he says I adjure you, enorkizo, it means to bind with an oath. It is dead serious. I am binding you to be sure that you make everyone hear this. You elders who first read this are bound by an oath by the Lord Himself to read this, you have an obligation to the Lord to read it to everybody. He is the one making the demand, it is His Word.

Now if I said to you, "Next Sunday, ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to read to you an inspired message that God gave me this week, it is for our church and I want you to hear every word, this is the Word of God that He has given me to read to you about our church, I want you to be here and I want you to listen to it," you'd be here. And the irony of it is I do that every week, even when you're not here and you miss what God said and you didn't come to hear it. Some of you will live your whole Christian life and miss half the books of the New Testament because you don't come on Sunday night to hear what God says. In Revelation it is repeated, "Let the church hear what the Spirit says." I want you to understand this. It is God's Word. You make sure everybody hears it, everybody. Have this letter read to all the brethren. By the way, the word "read" means read aloud, all God's revelation is for all God's people. Now you say, "Was he concerned that maybe they wouldn't hear it?" Sure. He was afraid that a feeling of disappointment at his absence might cause the church to neglect the letter, "Well it's only a letter and we wanted Paul." Or somebody might miss the meeting, when it is

read get bits and pieces, and you know how that goes. And get a garbled report of what was said and begin to believe something that isn't true. Furthermore the primary intention of the letter was to comfort people who were very upset because they had loved ones who were in Christ and who had died and they didn't know they were going show up in the Rapture, remember, and they needed to be comforted. Paul says all of those things are crucial, everybody's got to hear this letter, everybody.

Now what strikes me, beloved, about these three requests is that all three of these matters call for the assembling of all believers. I'm sure in praying for the pastors part of that was public because he says you're to be striving together in your prayers for me. The church was to come together and in the time of prayer and heart preparation during the service even as we worship together, your prayers are to ascend to God on behalf of your pastors. How else are you going to be able to greet one another with a kiss of love if you're not assembling yourselves with the saints? And how are you going to hear all the Word of God unless you come when the church meets? I told you earlier that's why I was so impressed with the church I was in in the Soviet Union in the Ukraine, I was amazed that though they have services five times a week, the last two to three hours everybody comes to all the services because the Word of the Lord is given, because the love of the saints is shared and because mutual corporate prayer is raised to God on behalf of the ministry.

Three parting requests, as fitting for us as they were then. And he sums it up with a final benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Grace...that's the heart of our theology. It's a theology of grace, God's unmerited favor toward undeserving sinners because of His own great love. Paul began and ended all his letter with grace. It was the first and the last word, all that God provides in Christ is summed up in the word grace. And by the way, that's the sign of the genuineness of Pauline epistles and such grace belongs only to those who are in Christ. That's why it's the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that he desires to be with.

That would be my desire for you. But I think there's a path to experiencing that. I could say to you, as Paul did, pray for us, love each other with affectionate gestures, demonstrable affection, listen to the Word of God and if you'll do those things, believe me, a special portion of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with you. All of that is vital to a healthy church, all of it.

Now a final word from Gardener Spring. "And who are what are ministers themselves? Frail men, fallible, sinning men, exposed to every snare, to temptation in every form and from the very post of observation they occupy they are an easier target for the fiery darts of the foe. They are not trite victims the great adversary is seeking when he would wound and cripple Christ's ministers, one such victim is worth more to the kingdom of darkness than a number of common men. And for this very reason their temptations are probably more subtle and severe than those encountered by ordinary Christians. If this subtle deceiver fails to destroy them, he cunningly aims at neutralizing their influence by quenching the fervor of their piety, lulling them into negligence and doing all in his power to render their work burdensome. How perilous is the condition of that minister then whose heart is

not encouraged, whose hands are not strengthened and who is not upheld by the prayers of his people. It is not in his own closet and on his own knees alone that he finds security and comfort and ennobling humbling and purifying thoughts and joys but it is when they also seek them in his behalf that he becomes a better and happier man and a more useful minister of the everlasting gospel. Nothing gives a people so much interest in their minister, an interest of the best kind as to pray for him. They will love him more, respect him more, attend more cheerfully and gain more profit from his ministry the more they commend him to God in their prayers. They feel a deeper interest in his work the more they pray for him and their children feel a deeper interest both in him and in his preaching when they regularly listen to supplications that affectionately commend him to the throne of the heavenly grace," end quote.

It's a great word. You want to pass on a love for the minister to your children? Demonstrate it to them in your prayers.

Now a number of times in the message I quoted from Gardener Spring. We have something very special for you this morning. That man was used by God to write this little book entitled, A Plea To Pray For Pastors. We have one for every family in our congregation this morning. I was asked some time back to write a forward for it. It was reprinted by Calvary Press in Amityville, New York because they felt it was so vital. We have one for every family. If you're a single person, we have one for you and then for each family we have one. And inserted into it is a little sheet like this, and on it it lists our pastoral staff, our board of elders, all of our missionaries, the faculty of the Master's Seminary, all the Master's Seminary alumni out pastoring, all of our pastors that we've sent out from our staff and all of the associated pastors that have been trained at Grace Church, they're all here, this is your prayer list to put this in to application. We want you to have this little book. I want you to take it home this afternoon and read it. It's not a long book...nine pages plus a forward, but it's the same richness that I shared with you this morning. And then I want you to take that little list maybe along with a little book and do what I've done, slide it in the flyleaf of your Bible where you have it, you might even put that little prayer list in the point of your Bible where you're reading every day so that as you open it for the next reading, you'll remember to pray for some more of your pastors and pastors that have come from our church to pastor here and around the world. Pray for us and for those who represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm going to ask the ushers to come right now, we're going to pass these out so everyone will have one. The prayer list is complete. Through the years, of course, the Lord has enabled us to send out more men and women from this church than we've ever had on the staff here at any given time, and we're so thrilled about that so you can learn all these names, many of them you will know and you can encompass them in your faithful prayers for your pastors here at Grace Church. We live in a time when the assumption is made that everything can be done by some method. And, of course, this fights strongly against the essence of prayer. We live in a time when man has just about solved every significant problem in his life in terms of food, shelter and security, the things that were once a

part of prayer. Lord, feed me my bread, Lord, give me clothes and a place to live and, Lord, protect me. We've got all that covered. We've got fancy houses and amazing food options and security. And maybe we have so many other methods in terms of ministry and things that we assume everything can be done by a process invented by man. All of this produces a prayerless kind of culture and it's a lie of Satan that we can do without God's power and it is a truth that God is powerful in response to your prayers. Let's bow together.

Father, we thank You for the encouraging word from Paul. May we be obedient in this regard that You might be honored in Your church for Christ's sake. Amen.

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