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

Peace in Every Circumstance
Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18
Code: 53-17

This morning I want you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. We now come to the last portion of this wonderful letter, the final three verses as Paul closes the epistle. This morning we're going to bring then to a conclusion our study, a study that has enriched us immeasurably.

In fact, this brief letter of only three chapters, 2 Thessalonians, has been filled with drama, the high drama of judgment, flaming fire, retribution on those who don't know God and don't obey the gospel. This brief little epistle has warned of the penalty of eternal destruction. It has dealt with the Rapture, the day of the Lord, the person and work of the coming Antichrist, as well as his destruction. It has anticipated Satanic power and signs and wonders. It has warned about the deceptiveness and wickedness of the future. This little epistle has also confronted some unruly and lazy undisciplined Christians who are to be dealt with firmly for their sins.

One writer looking at it in an overview sums it up by saying, "It is a tempestuous epistle." And he is right. It is turbulent. It is troubling. But as troubling and turbulent as it is, it closes with a calm...like the sea after the storm has passed. The last three verses are calm. The Thessalonian church, so strong in many ways, had been tormented by persecution, tossed around by false teaching, troubled by fear and sin. And Paul had endeavored to deal with all of these troubling things, all of the turmoil, by giving them instruction. And so we have gone word by word and phrase by phrase and verse by verse through this instruction.

Paul realizes that they can't remedy the situation. They can't deal with the persecution, the false teaching, the fear, the doubt, the sin, unless they understand the truth. And so he has given them instruction. But he also knows something else, he knows that no matter how well they understand the information, they do not have in themselves the ability to conform to it. There is nothing in them of their own ability, of their own resources to enable them to obey what the epistle instructs. In other words, Paul knows that first he must instruct, and second, he must call on God to enable. That has been the pattern of the whole epistle.

Go back to chapter 1 for a moment, and you remember that there is instruction down through verse 10, the Apostle Paul is instructing them about the coming judgment, the day of retribution, eternal destruction and all of that. He is instructing them about the time when He will come to be glorified in His saints. And then in verse 11 he says this, "To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with

power."

In other words, having given them all that instruction, he knows that they don't have the power to live according to it. They don't have the power to properly respond to even what they know. And so he prays that God would fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with His power.

In chapter 2 then he gives further instruction, instruction about the career of Antichrist, the deception of Satan, the wickedness to come. He instructs regarding matters of sanctification and standing firm and holding fast to the truth of the Word. But then in verse 16 again he says, "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, may He comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word." He again knows that no matter what they might understand, they don't have the spiritual resource to live according to it. And so again he closes a section of exhortation with a prayer.

In chapter 3 he starts out again seeking effectiveness in his own ministry, seeking faithfulness in his own ministry and seeking the same for them. And then in verse 5 he says, "And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ." Again he is calling on God to enable them to be what they need to be. And in chapter 3 verse 6 he launches into this discussion of sinning Christians in the church, calls them to obey a pattern of work and a pattern of harmony and life in the church that will please God. And again knowing that they don't have the resources he says in verse 16, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance, the Lord be with you all. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter, this is the way I write the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

This is the fourth time he has had, what we would call, a prayer wish, a benediction, in which he expresses the desire of his heart. It's almost as if he can only go so far and he's got this uncapped desire to ask God to enable them to do what he says. And every so often the praying just bursts forth. He goes a little while in chapter 1 and then prays for God's enabling, a little while in chapter 2 and prays for God's enabling, and twice he does it in chapter 3. You see, he understands that no matter what you know as a Christian, you don't pull it off on your own. You must be aided by the Lord, you must lean on His resources. And so in this last simple little closing section Paul calls on divine resources. He calls on personal blessings from the Lord to enable the Thessalonians, and all the rest of us, to respond to what he has taught. And he really is speaking about four things that we need. We need the Lord's peace. We need the Lord's strength. We need the Lord's truth. And we need the Lord's grace. And all four of them are in those three little verses...the Lord's peace, strength, truth and grace. And obviously we could take each of those great realities and spend a great amount of time on it, we'll try to condense it as best we can, stick closely to the text and give you the sense of what's on his heart. This then is the fourth of his prayers, or prayer wishes for you Greek students in the optative mode which expresses a wish. This is the fourth thing he really wants God to do to enable them to fulfill the instruction he has given. It is repeated prayer that bursts out in

this little epistle because it is Paul's very dominant awareness that no Christian, no matter how good, how obedient, how responsive, and how knowledgeable can in his own strength accomplish God's purposes.

First of all then he prays or wishes for their experience of God's peace, verse 16, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace." The first two words, "now may" mark a transition. The word "now" is transitional. He's moving from command and exhortation to petition and to prayer. He is now turning to the Lord. He is expressing not the prayer itself but the wish in his heart that shows up when he prays. And his wish is for them to experience peace...peace. He's asking for what God has already promised, for God has promised His own peace and strength and truth and grace. It isn't that he is asking something that God gives reluctantly or not at all. In fact, prayer really is asking God for what it is His will to give. Prayer really is lining up with what God has promised to do. He recognizes that God has promised His people peace and strength and truth and grace. And he pleads for God to fulfill His promise. He lines himself up with what God has expressed as His own intention and purpose. His first request is for that lovely, that most sought after, that most evasive and that most elusive reality called peace.

You say, "Well, what is peace? What is it?" Well the world defines it in simple terms, I guess, best by just lining up some synonyms, peace is the sense of calm and tranquility and quietness and bliss and contentment and well being that you feel when you believe that everything is well. Peace is that attitude of calm, that attitude of tranquility, that attitude of settled quiet that comes when you believe everything is well, everything is the way you'd like it.

Now that's a nice worldly definition of peace, rather shallow because frankly calm feelings, tranquility, quietness can be produced by a pill. They can be produced by a lie. They can be produced by a deception. They can be produced by a nap, or sleep in general. They can be produced by alcohol. Calm, peace, tranquility, a sense of well being can be produced when your old aunt dies and leaves you a fortune. It can be produced by biofeedback. It can be produced by the reassurance of a friend, or by somebody you love whispering sweet nothings in your ear and confirming how deeply they love you.

That's not the kind of peace that Paul has in mind because the kind of peace he prays for with regard to believers has nothing to do with human beings and nothing to do with human circumstances. It can't be produced by a pill. It can't be produced by sleep. It can't be produced by alcohol. It can't be produced by material gain. It cannot be produced by any mechanism that causes you to manipulate your own mind. It cannot be produced on a human level or a circumstantial level. It's not that kind of peace he's talking about. That kind of peace, frankly, is a very fleeting peace, very fleeting. The kind of peace that the world experiences is easily destroyed. It rarely lasts very long. It can be destroyed by man things. For example, failure, doubt, fear, difficulty, anxiety over the outcome of something, violated relationships, guilt, shame, distress, regret, sorrow, the fear of being overpowered or

defeated, the anxiety about being wrong, the anxiety about making a bad decision or a wrong choice, the anticipation of being mistreated or maligned, actually being mistreated, being victimized by someone. That peace can be shattered by the unknown, the uncertain future, bitterness, anger, pride, vengeance, any challenge to your place, your position, your possessions or your security. That is a very fragile peace.

And all of that stuff that I just listed is a part of life daily. That's just life. And as life doses out its normal dose, it just robs us of peace, human peace, very fragile is this peace.

But we're not talking about that kind of peace. We're not talking about a fragile human circumstantial sense of calm, a calm induced by a drug. We're talking about something completely different. We're talking about a spiritual peace. And spiritual peace, the true, deep-down peace is the attitude of the heart and mind that calmly confidently believes and thus knows that all is well between the soul and God. That's the peace we're talking about. It's that confidence that everything is right between myself and God. And He is lovingly in control of my life in time and eternity. It is the presence of a calm assurance built on the knowledge that my sins are forgiven, God is concerned with my well-being and heaven is ahead. It's a deep-down peace, it has nothing to do with what anybody says to you, it has nothing to do with what anybody does to you, or doesn't do to you, it has nothing to do with any circumstance in life whatsoever. It is the peace that God gives to His beloved children. It is their possession and their privilege by right.

This peace is defined for us in several ways in verse 16. First of all, it is divine. "Now may the Lord of peace Himself grant you peace." The Lord of peace is the one who gives it. He is the one who grants it. "Himself," by the way, that pronoun is emphatic in the sentence and it's emphasizing His personal involvement in this. "Himself, the Lord of peace, may He give you peace." May God, the Lord, personally give it to you because it comes personally from Him. It is the very essence of His nature.

To say it simply, peace is an attribute of God. I don't know if you think of it that way, you think of God being characterized by attributes of grace, and mercy and justice and righteousness and wisdom and truth and omnipotence and immutability and eternality and whatever. But do you ever think of God as being characteristically peace? He is peace. Whatever it is that He gives us He has and He is. God is love, we don't argue about that. And God is also peace. He has no lack of perfect peace in His being. God is at all times at perfect peace. There's no stress. God is never stressed. God is never in anxiety. God never worries, God never doubts and God never fears. God is never at discord with Himself. He is never at cross purposes, it's never so that He can't make up His mind. He is never troubled. He is never indecisive. He is never unclear. He is never unsure. He is never threatened.

God lives in perfect calm, God lives in perfect tranquility, God lives in perfect contentment. Why? Because He's in charge of everything and He can operate everything perfectly according to His own

will exactly the way He wants it all the time. There is nothing in the entire universe that goes on that He doesn't know about and there is nothing in the entire universe that can withstand His purposes. He knows there are no surprises for His omniscience. There are no unknowns to His omnipresence. There are no changes, no doubts, no fears. Even His wrath is clear, controlled, calm and confident. There are no threats to His omnipotence. There is no possible sin that can stain His holiness. There is no sinner who can appear before Him who is beyond His grace. There is no threat to His immutable plan. There is no guilt in His mind. There is no shame in His mind. There is no regret in His mind for He has never done anything, said anything or thought anything that He would in any way change.

He enjoys perfect and eternal harmony within Himself. He therefore is peace. And here He is called "the Lord of peace, the Lord of the peace," literally, the definite article is there. The peace, not the kind the world has, but the real peace, the divine kind. He is peace, He is the source of peace. And what Paul wants is that the Lord of peace would give His kind of peace. If you look at the trinity you find that it's clear in Scripture that every member of the trinity is peace and gives peace. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "The God of peace," so does Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 4:9, and Hebrews 13:20, a common name for God, the God of peace. He is the author of peace. First Corinthians 14:33 says, "He is not the author of confusion but of peace." He is peace, the originator, the source and the author of it.

The second member of the trinity, the Son the Lord Jesus Christ is here called "the Lord of peace." Interestingly enough at the end of 1 Thessalonians Paul refers to the God of peace, here to the Lord of peace...both the first and second member of the trinity equally being God, equally being Lord, equally being the source of peace. Ephesians 2:14 says, "Christ who is our peace." He is called in Scripture "the prince of peace." He is peace. He is the source of peace. Colossians 1:20, He has made peace.

Also the Holy Spirit is the source of peace. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. Romans 14:17 says the Kingdom is peace in the Holy Spirit.

So, God is peace. It is that divine peace possessed by the trinity...Father, Son and Holy Spirit...that Paul wants us to have, that well-being that is deep-down settled and confident that all is well with God.

Secondly, we learn that it's not only divine but it is a gift. "Now may the Lord of peace Himself grant you peace." The word "grant" is the verb to give. It speaks of a gift. It is a sovereign gracious gift from the trinity, bestowed on those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a gift from God.

In Psalm 85, a wonderful verse, verse 8, you might not read this verse and think about it, but in Psalm 85:8 I read it to you because it ought to be kept in mind, "I will hear what God the Lord will say, for He

will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones." God grants peace to those who belong to Him.

This is so much a part of the New Testament. Start at Romans some time and read it in the first chapter of each of the letters...Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Titus, Philemon, go into 2 John, and as you read you'll find in all of those epistles peace...peace...peace given to God's people. Some times it says grace and peace. Peace is a gift from the Lord. It is given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ and an example of that, you'll remember, in John 20 as he walked in the upper room to meet His disciples He said, "Peace be unto you," in verse 19. In verse 21 He said, "Peace be unto you," and again in verse 26, "Peace be unto you." He was the giver of peace. It's as if the Father authored peace, the Son purchased peace and then gives it to us now in this age through His Holy Spirit.

Now the question comes again about the unsaved people. Don't they have peace? I mean, isn't there some measure of peace that they have? It is a gift? Does God give it to them? Listen to Isaiah chapter 57. There were some people going around saying "Peace, peace," saying that God was giving peace. That needed to be dealt with and Isaiah deals with it. In chapter 57 verse 19 he says, "Peace, peace to him who is far, and to him who is near, says the Lord." In other words, the Lord says I'll give peace, I'll give it to people far and people near. It may be an allusion to "I'll give it to the Jew, I'll give it to the Gentile, I'll give it to anyone." "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, it cannot be quiet, its waters toss up refuse and mud, there is no peace, says my God, for the wicked."

God says I'll give peace but not to the wicked...not to the wicked. So if you ask the question...do the unsaved people have peace from God? The answer is no. Thomas Watson wrote a great paragraph on this issue, he said, "Peace flows from sanctification, but they being unregenerate have nothing to do with peace. They may have a truce but no peace. God may forebear the wicked awhile and stop the roaring of His canon, but though there be a truce yet there is no peace. The wicked may have something which looks like peace, but it is not. They may be fearless and stupid but there is a great difference between a stupefied conscience and a pacified conscience. This is the devil's peace. He rocks men in the cradle of security. He cries `Peace, peace," when men are on the precipice of hell." Then listen to this great statement, "The seeming peace a sinner has is not from the knowledge of his happiness, but the ignorance of his danger." It is not from the knowledge of his happiness, but the ignorance of his danger.

It is the peace of a delusion. True peace is the child of saving grace. And the one who does not have saving grace does not have true peace. Whatever peace Satan can convince him he has is the peace of his ignorance because he does not understand his true condition or he would have no peace. In Romans 15:13 Paul giving another benediction says, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." Peace comes to those who believe.

Now there is a kind of false peace that you see in people and they will defend it. So maybe I ought to comment on it. The nature of this false peace is something like this, and this won't be exhaustive but just to give you some understanding. It has confidence that all is well, but the confidence is based on conceit, not fact. It is based on pride, not truth. It is not a peace that comes from an understanding of their true condition, but it is a peace that comes on their conceited assessment of themselves as being worthy. It is the peace of presumption. It is the peace that says "I'm okay, I'm a good person, God surely will take me to heaven, I know everything is going to work out in the end, I'm sure it's all going to be fine." It's the peace of pride, it's the peace of conceit, it's the peace of ignorance. It's the peace of the stupefied conscience, as Thomas Watson called it. It's an allusion.

the second thing that is a part of the peace of an unregenerate man is that it is...it is separating what God has joined. That kind of peace separates what God has joined. Simply stated, God joins peace to holiness...holiness and peace are two sides of the same coin, they are back to back. You cannot have peace without holiness. And in Psalm 85:10 the Bible puts it this way, "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other, they have fused." The foolish man, according to Deuteronomy 29:19 and quite an interesting verse, the foolish man, the boasting man says, and I quote, "I have peace even though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart." In other words, he's living under the illusion that you can separate what you are from your condition before God, you can't. The wicked are sinful, the wicked are vain and yet they think all is well between them and God. It is not. What a delusion. You might as well suck health out of poison as to suck peace out of sin. He isn't going...you're not going to find it there.

There's another component about this false peace. It cannot pass the tests of life...it cannot pass the tests of life. In fact, whatever this false peace is, it is easily shaken, it is severely shaken at the least trouble. And it leaves people in despair. On the other hand, true peace, that deep-down confidence that is all is well between us and God, when it is tested is made stronger. False peace tested is made weaker therefore true peace welcomes trials. It embraces the cross of life. False peace the world has based on conceit and ignorance, separated from holiness and untested. True peace...true peace only God can give and He gives it only to the redeemed. It becomes the fundamental possession of every child of God. Paul said in Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God." It comes to the justified. It is that peace which God gives to His own, that deep-down confidence that all is well. And Paul says, "I want you, Thessalonians, to enjoy that peace, I want the Lord who is the source of it to give it to you in its fullest measure."

There's a third element in what he says and that is that this peace is not only divine and a gift but it is always available. "May the Lord of peace continually give you peace." By throwing the word "continually" in there, he is affirming that it is constantly available. This is not presumptuous as if God can only give it intermittently, he knows it's always available. And he says, "I want God to give it to you all the time."

It can be interrupted, you know. It can be. And it isn't God who interrupts it, it's we who interrupt it. We can interrupt peace. You say, "How?" By succumbing to our flesh. You see, listen now, our flesh, our fallen flesh still unredeemed can still become victimized by the doubt and the fear and the anxieties that I told you characteristically steal the peace of the world...the threat of the future, the unknown, the surprises of life, disease and death, and all of those things that trouble the wicked and for which they find no resource and lose their peace can also become troubling things to a weak Christian. We can be disturbed from our peace because we stop looking at the deep-down unalterable permanent and eternal condition in which we live before an unfailing God who will bring us to glory and we start to base our happiness on the issues of life and they change and we become distressed.

I'll tell you right now, the person who can ride through the toughest issues of life in a calm is not indifferent...they're just trusting God. You can victimized by the same things that victimize the unregenerate if you live in the flesh, or according to the flesh. You say, "Well, in the case that we are troubled and distressed and disturbed and anxious and fearful, how do we restore the peace? How can it be continual? How can it be uninterrupted?" Well there's just a few things you need to do and you know that first of all trust in God...trust in God. The psalmist says to himself, "Why art thou disquieted, O my soul? Hope in God." Why are you so upset and troubled? Have you forgotten who your God is? Psalm 42:11. Trust in God. Turn from sin and begin to be obedient. Leviticus 26 God says to His children Israel, He says, "Keep My statutes, obey My commandments," then in verse 6 He says, "And I'll give you peace...I'll give you peace." Peace will be restored through obedience. Turn from the sin. And sometimes the sin is the doubt and the fear and the anxiety itself and sometimes it is a sin that has produced that. Turn from that and begin to obey God.

Another thing that will restore your peace is to accept the chastening purposes of God, the refining, reproving purposes of God. Job 5, a very interesting...very interesting section. "Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, so do not despise the discipline of the almighty." And then all the way down in verse 24, "And you will know that your tent is secure and you will visit your abode and fear no loss." In other words, if you'll understand that God is reproving and God is chastening and God in verse 18 is inflicting pain and then giving relief, wounding and healing, He's delivering you from your troubles, redeeming you from death, hiding you from the scourge of the tongue. You'll be able to laugh at violence and laugh at famine and you'll never be afraid of wild beasts. If you just understand that through all the trials and all the changes of life and all the chastenings, God is at work perfecting you, you'll be at peace. Romans 2:10 says if you want peace do good. It says all that do good will enjoy peace. Trust in God, turn from sin and walk in obedience, endure refining, reproving and chastening, joyfully knowing that God is concerned with your well-being and all of that. Do what is good, what is noble, what is right. Galatians 5:22 says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, walk in the Spirit and you'll have that fruit. If you walk in obedience to the Spirit of God you'll have peace.

In Galatians there's a marvelous statement at the end of chapter 6 and verse 16. He says, "All who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them." What rule? Not the rule of legalism but the rule of loving God from the heart. So if you love God from the heart and you're not working your Christian life legalistically, but out of the depth of your heart peace will be restored. It's not shallow, it's deep. It's not what you do on the surface, but what you are on the inside that brings peace.

James tells us in James chapter 3 and verse 18, "The seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." What's he saying? Living according to the Word, living according to heavenly wisdom, living according to God's revealed standard of righteousness brings peace. And then peace also comes through prayer. We ask God for peace. First Peter 3:11 says, "Let him seek peace and pursue it."

And I guess it could all be summed up in Colossians 3...Colossians 3:15, Paul says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." To sum it up you can say this, if you want to make peace in your life, make war with sin. Learn to trust God in everything, to turn from sin and walk in obedience, to endure His reproving and chastening and refining, do what is good, walk in the Spirit, let your commitment to the Lord come from the inside out, not the outside alone. Live by the Word of God in a righteous way. And pray and seek peace. This will restore your peace. Paul there is praying that the troubled Thessalonians may go through this process by God's prompting that their peace might be continual.

It is divine peace. It is a gift. It is always available. It can be interrupted. It can be restored and is available any time you want to restore it. Fourth, it is not subject to circumstances. He says, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance." It is not a peace that is subjected to any kind of outward effect. It is uneffected by anything that happens in the worldly realm. It is not built on any human relationship. It is not built on any human circumstance. It is built on an unchanging divine relationship and a divine plan and a divine promise from an unfailing God who will secure you in Himself forever and ever and do everything for your good. It is an unbreakable, unassailable, transcendent peace...not like the world, Jesus in John 14:27 says, "My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives give I unto you, neither let your heart be troubled nor let it be afraid." There's nothing to fear, there's nothing to trouble you, I'm giving you a transcendent peace that is unassailed by any human circumstance. Paul says I want you to have that kind of well being. No matter what comes by persecution, no matter what comes by trouble, no matter what comes by sin in the fellowship, no matter what comes by false teaching, no matter what might come in anticipation of the return of Christ and impending judgment, I want you to have an internal quietness, calmness, tranquility that is absolutely unassailable and I want God to grant you that so that in the midst of all the things in the world that are intended to tear you up and trouble your life, you live in a perfect calm.

Secondly, his prayer is for them to know God's strength. At the end of verse 16 he says, "The Lord be with you all...The Lord be with you all." Now we could answer that by saying, "Well He's everywhere. He's everywhere at the same time." And we could even ask Paul if he had lately read Psalm 139 because in Psalm 139 it says, "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven Thou art there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Thy hand will lead me and Thy right hand will lay hold of me. And if I say, Surely the darkness will cover me and the light around me will be night, even though darkness isn't dark to Thee and the night is as bright as the day, darkness and light are alike to Thee, You're everywhere." In Acts 17:27 and 28 Paul told those philosophers on Mars Hill that it's God in whom we live and move and have our being. He's everywhere.

But he's not talking about omnipresence. He's not saying to them...May the Lord be with you...in the sense that He's there. No. More than that. When Jesus came into the world, Matthew 1:22 and 23, they said of Him, "His name will be called Emanuel, which means God with us." Well you say, "God's always been with us. God's everywhere." He's never been with us like this...never incarnate, never where you could hear Him and see Him and touch Him. Never like that. Never to walk in the world like that and to live and then to die, never has God been with us like that. And I'll go a step further. Jesus said in Matthew 28:20, "Lo, I am with you always." I believe He was talking about what He was about to do and that was send His Holy Spirit. In John chapter 14 He told His disciples that He was going to go away. And they were in a state of shock at the thought of His absence. But He told them even in His absence they would have His presence. He says this, "I will ask the Father and He will give you another helper that He may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it doesn't behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."

In other words, He says I'm going to go but I'm going to send somebody, another helper, one just like Myself. In fact, in verse 23, "If anyone loves Me he will keep My Word and My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our abode with him." When you get the Holy Spirit you get Christ and God, you get the whole package. I'll always be there...not in the sense of omnipresence, just being there, but in the sense of power, in the sense of enabling. In Matthew 28:18 He said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth," and then He turned right around and said, "Lo, I am with you always." I'm with you for power, that's the purpose. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, Acts 1:8, you will receive power, strength. That's the issue. Presence for power. Presence for strength because, frankly, in our own flesh we don't have the strength, we need Him for strength. We need His strength in temptation. We need His strength to hold us up when the temptation would overwhelm us. We need the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 that no temptation is taken you but such is as common to man and God is faithful who will never allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will always make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. It is the strength of Christ that opens up the path of escape in the midst of temptation. You need His strength for temptation.

Secondly, you need His strength to face the devil and demons. Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might. Why? Because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but we wrestle against the principalities and the powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies, summed up he calls them the schemes of Satan. You need strength. You need divine power. You need divine power and strength to be faithful, to not defect. In 2 Timothy 1 Paul says in verse 15, "All who are in Asia have forsaken me." Everybody's defected. Then he says in chapter 2 verse 1 to Timothy, "But you be strong in the Lord, in the grace that is in Christ." You need strength from Him to be faithful. You need strength from Him to serve. You can't even use your spiritual gift. You can't even serve. Colossians 1:29, "For this purpose I labor, striving according to His power which mightily works within me." Strength to overcome sin and temptation. Strength to face the devil and demons. Strength to stay faithful. Strength for service.

You need strength even for worship. Paul reminds the Corinthians in chapter 5 and verse 4, "In the name of the Lord Jesus, when you are assembled with the power of our Lord Jesus." In other words, when the church comes together there is resident strength, the strength of Christ to lead them in their worship and in their dealing with sin.

You need strength for perseverance, for endurance, otherwise you would defect and lose your salvation if it weren't for His strength. The Lord will deliver me, 2 Timothy 4:18, from every evil deed and bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. The Lord by His strength will bring me to glory. He'll hold me. He'll keep me. Jude 24, "He is able to keep me from falling and to make me stand in the presence of His glory blameless and with great joy." You need His strength for perseverance, security, endurance.

You need His strength for trials. His strength is made perfect in your weakness, 2 Corinthians 12:9 and 10. You need His strength for evangelization. We can't evangelize without His power. It's after the Holy Spirit comes upon us that we become witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, His power enabling us. In Acts 9:22 a wonderful statement is made. "Saul kept increasing in strength," as a result he was proving Jesus is the Christ. He was so strong because the power of God was upon him and thus his ministry was potent, it was powerful. In the eighteenth chapter, verse 9, the Lord said to Paul in the midst of the night in a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, go on speaking, don't be silent, for I am with you and no man will attack you in order to harm you." That's the promise. Nobody is going to touch you, I'm with you, I'm going to sustain you, I'm going to control you, I'm going to empower you. You need power for evangelism.

At the end of Mark, the last verse in Mark is so wonderful. I love this verse. "And they went out and preached everywhere while the Lord worked with them." They went out and preached everywhere while the Lord worked with them. You need power for evangelism.

And then I guess you could sum it up and say you need power for spiritual fullness. In Ephesians 3 everything is summed up, verse 16, "That you would be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that ultimately you can be filled up with all the fullness of God." You need spiritual power to become like God, to become like Christ. You need spiritual power to do everything. Philippians sums it up again. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

All that strength is available in Christ. It's all there. It can be interrupted, too. But it can be restored if you'll trust the Lord, if you'll obey Him, if you'll endure His reproof and His refinement, if you'll do good, walk in the Spirit, love Him from the heart, live by the Word, pray and let Christ rule your life. Strength.

Just very briefly there's a third thing that he prays for them and it's that they might have truth. It really doesn't come out in the prayer itself, he makes a little break in verse 17 between the prayer wish which includes verse 18. But it really does show where his heart is. "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter," this is the way I write. This is very important, very very important. He's concerned that they have God's truth. He knows he's the agent of God's truth and he doesn't want them to be confused about what is really his writing.

Back in chapter 2, look at verse 2 for a moment. Somebody had come along and told them some lies. They lied to them about the Rapture. And they lied to them about the day of the Lord. This was a false teacher. But in order to make his lies believable, the middle of verse 2 says, "He had a letter as if from us," to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. In other words, to be believable, the false teachers said, "I've got a letter from Paul," and he was waving around this thing, "this is my letter from Paul." And Paul realized he had to deal with this. And I guess he hadn't really faced this before. But when he wrote the first epistle it probably came to his attention that people were, one, not accepting it as from him. That became a reality soon and is still a reality today. You still have people today who want to deny that Paul wrote his letters. But there were...there are those people who would say, "Nah, nah, that's not from Paul, we don't accept that as authoritative." If they didn't like what it said they wouldn't accept it as authoritative.

Well Paul hadn't...hadn't really faced that until he wrote a letter. So he wrote 1 Thessalonians and now he becomes very much aware that people are going to deny his authorship. Secondly, they're going to forge letters that aren't written by him as if they were and therefore they're going to take truth away from the truth and they're going to add lies to the church and confuse the church. Well he's so burdened that they get the truth that what he says to them at the end of this letter is to seal the fact that this is indeed his own letter, he has written it. He says, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand," he's dictated the letter, as was his custom. And he comes to the very end and he takes the pen away from his emanuensis(?) or his secretary and with his own hands he says, "I am writing this greeting with my own hand and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter." From now on, every

single letter that comes from me is going to have something I have personally written with my own hand at the end...and then he adds, "This is the way I write." You can tell whether it's authentic because it's going to have my writing...which is inimitable. We still do that. We authenticate documents today by a signature.

And what is he saying? He's saying I'm very concerned that you have the truth of God. There's a lot more to come. I mean, you've got two letters, you're going to be exposed before this deal is over to more of them from me, to some from John, to some from Peter, to some from Jude, to one from James. And you need to know all of that is the truth of God. I don't want any doubt about mine and so I'm going to sign off every time like this. The only time he deviates from that in the future is in the book of Philemon which apparently, according to Philemon 19, he wrote all in his own handwriting and didn't dictate it in any part. And perhaps Galatians, according to chapter 6 verse 11, he may have written the whole of the letter to the Galatians as well. But always his own inimitable handwriting was there because he was so consumed with the fact that God's people needed to have the revealed truth and not be confused about what was authentic. He was the inspired instrument of truth and God wanted His people to have truth. And Paul could say with John, he had no greater joy than to see his children walk in the truth. He wanted them to have the truth. He knew they needed it. And so he throws in this which also expresses his wish for them to have the truth and to know it is the truth.

He was very concerned about that. In Romans chapter 9 and verse 1, "I am telling the truth," he says. In 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 7, "And for this I was appointed a preacher and an Apostle, I am telling the truth, I am not lying." And why does he say that? Well because there were people who were denying him. In chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians verse 10, "As the truth of Christ is in me," and he goes on. He was concerned about people knowing he spoke the truth. God is a God of truth, He is the only true God, He is the God who cannot lie. And Christ is His incarnate truth. And the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. And the Word is the body of truth...Thy Word is truth, John 17:17. God wants us to have His truth. He's given us the indwelling Spirit of truth who is the anointing, who lead us into all truth so that we need not be taught by any human source. So Paul says I wish you truth, and I don't want you to be confused about it.

And, beloved, that's the wish of the Apostle for all believers and my wish for you that you would have this kind of peace, this kind of submerged tranquility that is touched by nothing on the surface of the waters of life, this kind of strength that gives you the power to do everything God wants you to do to His glory and this commitment to truth, to study the Word of God and to understand its great great realities.

Then a final wish, and we close with a brief statement, verse 18, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." He wants them to have grace. He wants every Thessalonian believer to have grace, every man, every woman who put his faith or her faith in Christ to have God's grace. And so the

prayer wish picks up again in verse 18 and he wishes for grace.

What is grace? God's goodness, God's benevolence given to those who don't deserve it. God's goodness, God's benevolence given to those who don't deserve it. It is grace decreed by God given to us through Christ. Grace and truth, it says, came through Jesus Christ. The grace of God has appeared, Paul said to Titus. It has appeared through the work of Christ. It comes to us as the Spirit of God brings saving grace. And once we become a Christian then there is enabling grace. And that's what he's praying about, the enabling grace, grace for endurance, grace that is sufficient, as 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, for every serious trial. Grace for service, the kind Paul talked about in 1 Timothy 1, when he says as explicitly as it could be said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me because He considered me faithful, putting me into the service, or into the ministry, even though I was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor and it was the grace of our Lord that did it."

Grace for service, grace for endurance, grace for growth spiritually, grow in grace, 2 Peter 3:18. Grace for love and grace for humility and grace for sacrifice and grace for generosity. All of those things typified by the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. In fact, they summed it up. They summed it up. They were examples, Paul said, of the surpassing grace of God which is in you. He wants God's grace. There...God's enabling grace to take them through their trials, to make them effective in ministry, to cause them to grow, to strengthen their love and their humility and their sacrifice and their generosity that they would be overwhelmed with this grace.

It's available. There's no limit to it. And again, the conditions to receive it are trusting God, obeying His Word, enduring His refining process, doing good, walking in the Spirit, living your Christianity from the heart, living by the Word of God and praying. As we are what we ought to be, God infuses us with His peace and His strength and His truth and His grace.

There's a wonderful mystery to this, isn't there? All this exhortation and now he asks God to make it possible. You say, "How do you harmonize this?" All I know is this, in order to live your Christian life and mine the way God wants us to, it takes all we are and all He is. It's going to take all the commitment and dedication that I can find within me as a regenerate person and all the power that God has available to Him to make me what I ought to be, all His peace is available, His strength, His truth, His grace. It is interrupted by my iniquity and my sin, it is restored by the process we saw there. And so I say, it's all of Him and yet it takes all of me. I leave the mystery of resolving that harmony to the Lord Himself.

Father, thank You again this morning for Your Word. Thank You for this wonderful letter which we have concluded, but which has left its mark deeply imprinted in our lives. Father, we would ask You for our own lives, for this congregation, for this church, these people, that You would grant Your

peace, that You would grant Your strength, that You would grant Your truth and Your grace without measure, unbounded. Lord, that it would all be available to us that we might fulfill all the exhortations and commands of Scripture. Lord, we want to dedicate ourselves a new and afresh to that end and ask at the same time that these things which You have promised be poured out upon us for we cannot act independently of Your resources. May we follow as faithful servants energized by Your Spirit, Your very presence within us and thus may we be the kind of Christians that Paul longed the Thessalonians should become, that we might be to the praise of Your glory in Your Son's name. Amen.

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