Apostolic prayers - *Paul's Prayer in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12*

1. Background to Paul's letters

a. Before we look at today's apostolic prayer I thought it would be helpful to provide some context for Paul's prayers for the churches. These were actual communities which he visited during his missionary journeys and therefore he prays for them from a father's heart. These are communities that helped establish and grow. Paul was an apostle, a "sent one", sent out to preach the gospel and establish believing communities all across a large part of the gentile world.

b. Paul travelled within the Roman Empire as a roman citizen. We often think of Paul as the one sent to the gentiles but mostly he went to gentile nations to encourage Jewish believers and help them to begin to lead believing communities amongst the gentiles.

Acts 14:22 *…. [22] strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*

c. Most of his travels took him into Asia Minor and Macedonia (present day Greece and Turkey) finally taking him to Rome – the centre of the Roman Empire. Sometimes he stayed for a few weeks, others for a few years. As he travelled on so he wrote to the churches he had fathered to encourage and teach them.

d. Paul's letters differ in their focus. Some focus on Christology (the person, nature and role of Christ), some of Ecclesiology (the church), some on Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) and others eschatology (what happens at the end of the age).

e. In previous weeks we have looked at prayers in Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians – these were all places (Ephesus, Colossi (?) and Philippi) that Paul visited on his second missionary journey and then wrote to some ten years later while he was under house arrest in Rome. These letters are predominately Christological and Ecclesiological hence, the prayers we have looked at in previous sessions are for revelation of who Jesus is and how we respond to Him in intimacy and love both for Him and one another.

f. Today and next time we are going to look at Paul's two prayers for the believers in Thessalonica. The first and second letters to the Thessalonians were written very soon after Paul has visited them on his second missionary journey. Whilst still on his journey and staying in Corinth he wrote to them for a specific purpose.

g. They were concerned they had missed Jesus' return! So Paul writes to reassure and teach them about the end times and therefore this letter is predominately eschatological. This was a church which had withstood much persecution with faith and love and Paul encourages them to persevere and not give up.

h. If you want to know more about Paul's journeys and what happened at each place read the book of Acts. It's a great story!

2. Understanding the context of Paul's prayer to be counted worthy

a. Paul prayed for the saints to walk in the glory and benefits of wholeheartedness (2 Thes. 1:11-12). He prayed for believers to be inspired by the Spirit to respond to Jesus in a way *worthy of Him*—in wholeheartedness. He also connected this with the ability to *fulfil all of God's will* in their lives.

2 Thess. 1:11-12 ***11*** *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfil every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,* ***12*** *so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

b. ***Therefore***: We gain understanding of this prayer by understanding what Paul said just before it.

2 Thes. 1:4-10 ***4*** *Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.* ***5*** *This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—* ***6*** *since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,* ***7*** *and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels* ***8*** *in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.* ***9*** *They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from[b] the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,* ***10*** *when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*

c. Paul affirmed their perseverance in persecution. Earlier, he wrote that he sent Timothy to encourage them not to be shaken in their afflictions

1 Thes. 3:2-4 ***2*** *and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker] in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,* ***3*** *that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.* ***4*** *For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.*

d. Paul identified three ways that the Lord has wisely or righteously determined to use persecution and the sinful mistreatment of others to strengthen and transform the saints. It is **manifested evidence or proof** of God's righteous or good leadership. It is proof that God is judging or leading His people in a wise way that leads to their greatest benefit by appointing them to endure persecution in this age. (2Thess.1:4-5)

e. It requires spiritual insight to agree with His judgments (leadership decisions) to appoint us to endure persecution as part of His wise leadership to enable us to give Him a worthy response.

Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*

f. We must cultivate God's view of how persecution "works for us" to our great benefit.

2 Cor.4:16-18 ***16*** *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.* ***17*** *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,* ***18*** *as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

g. ***Evidence 1***:

.***5*** *This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering*

God weans us from worldliness to ***make us worthy*** or fit to glorify Jesus. The word "worthy" here doesn't mean "deserving of," but rather "suited for," "prepared for," or "fitted for." To walk worthy of the Lord is to walk in agreement with His heart and ways. We give

a *worthy response* to God by resisting compromise and embracing God's ways, thus, being prepared and in position by the grace of God to walk in the fullness of our calling. (2 Thess.1:5)

i The first way in which persecution gives "manifest evidence" or proof of God's wise or righteous leadership is in how it leads us to align more with Jesus and His leadership. God appointed the saints to endure persecution so that they may be "counted worthy" or "transformed in a way befitting" of His kingdom. This is evidence of God's wise leadership.

ii Pressure changes the conversation that we have with God. We get connected more and more to the fact that we are living for something far more glorious and bigger than what we experience in this life.

h. ***Evidence 2***:

.[5] This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, …… [6] since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction …….the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels

God will eventually ***repay*** or punish those who persecute His people. Thus, we do not get into a wrong spirit by seeking our own vengeance nor do we "give in" to being like those who afflict us. It is right that He afflicts those who afflict you. There is a cry for justice in the human spirit—we can be assured that justice will be done, yet it will happen mostly after Jesus returns.

i. ***Evidence 3***:

[7] and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels

God gives His persecuted people relief (*rest)*. We will receive a 100-fold recovery of all that we lost in being persecuted. This sure hope purifies, prepares, and makes us suited to meet Jesus—this increases more as persecution causes us to look to our glorious, eternal future.

Matt.5:11-12 *[11] "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

1 John 3:2-3*… but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

j. Each of these three manifest evidences of His good leadership have a corresponding domino effect in progressively changing how we think, feel, and process pressure and His leadership in our life. Those who are transformed so as to respond in a way that is worthy of Jesus will bring glory to Him on that Day that He returns. They will be "trophies of His grace."

2 Thess.1:10-11 *[10] when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed [11]* ***To this end*** *we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfil every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,*

k. We are to live a way so we will **not be ashamed** of our lifestyle at His coming. As we endure persecution, the Spirit redirects our marvelling from the things of this world to **marvel on**

the beauty of Jesus. It will be understood as we see the wisdom and glory of having marvelled at Christ before He comes—to prepare us for that Day.

l. ***To this end***: In view of the three benefits that give manifest evidence that enduring persecution results in long term benefits for God's people, Paul prayed that God would make them worthy of this calling—which includes preparing and making them fit to glorify and marvel at Jesus.

3. Responding in a way that is Worthy of Jesus

11 *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfil every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power*

a. Paul prayed that God would release the optimum environment (blessing and pressures) and increase the activity of His Spirit to result in strengthening His people ***until*** they respond to God in a way that He esteems as worthy of Jesus, thus enabling them to walk in mature partnership with Him.

b. Being made "worthy" by God has two applications in Scripture that are "according to grace."

i First, by the blood of Jesus we are made worthy to be accepted into God's family by receiving the gift of salvation. No one is "worthy" in the sense of deserving to be forgiven. Salvation is a free gift because of Jesus' worthiness—we are justified by faith alone (Rom. 3:28; 5:1).

ii Second, we respond to Him with obedience that is "worthy" of Jesus and His leadership (Mt. 3:7-8; 10:37-38; Lk. 21:36; Acts 5:41; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10-11; 1 Thes. 2:12; 2 Thes. 1:5, 11; Rev. 3:4). It is the Lord's plan to transform those whom He freely justifies.

c. The Lord gives a greater measure of grace to the humble who draw near to Him (Jas. 4:6-8). God's people must be strengthened to escape the snare of sin and to stand in victory (Lk. 21:36). The phrase *be made worthy* is also translated as *have strength* in most modern translations. The idea is to be *strengthened to respond* to Jesus in a way that is *worthy* of who He is and to *stand in victory* as overcomers instead of falling into sin. By watching, we will receive greater insight into what God is doing, and by praying we receive greater *strength* to love and obey Jesus unto victory.

Luke 21:34-36 ***34*** *"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap…..* ***36*** *But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength (be made worthy) to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand (with victory) before the Son of Man."*

4. Four benefits and results of walking worthy of the Lord

a. Paul requested four specific benefits when asking God to strengthen them to walk worthy.

2 Thess. 1:11-12 ***11*** *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfil every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,* ***12*** *so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

b. ***Fulfil all the good pleasure***: Our vision is to walk in the *fullness of all that God has ordained.* It is God's pleasure to use His people as vessels to release His kingdom power. He is not reluctant; thus we contend with confidence for the *full release* of His purposes—individually and corporately. Even after David stumbled, he rose and fulfilled "all" of God's will for his life

Luke 12:32[32] *"Do not fear…for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

c. ***Work of faith by his power***: He releases His power in response to our "partnership of faith" in connecting with His heart and contending for the fullness of His purposes. The measure of our partnership with Jesus is affected directly by the measure of our responsiveness to His leadership.

Phil. 3:12 [12] *I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me.*

d. ***Jesus may be glorified in you***: God desires to put Jesus' glory on display through the dedicated lives of His weak people so that Jesus may receive the glory due His name. God promised to release a greater measure of the Spirit's activity (Joel 2:28) as we turn to Him with all our heart (Joel 2:12).

e. ***That you are glorified in Him***: Believers are glorified in Christ in two ways.

i First, in this age, we experience His glory that enables us to walk in Christlikeness. The manifest presence of God's glory increases on our lives in times of persecution.

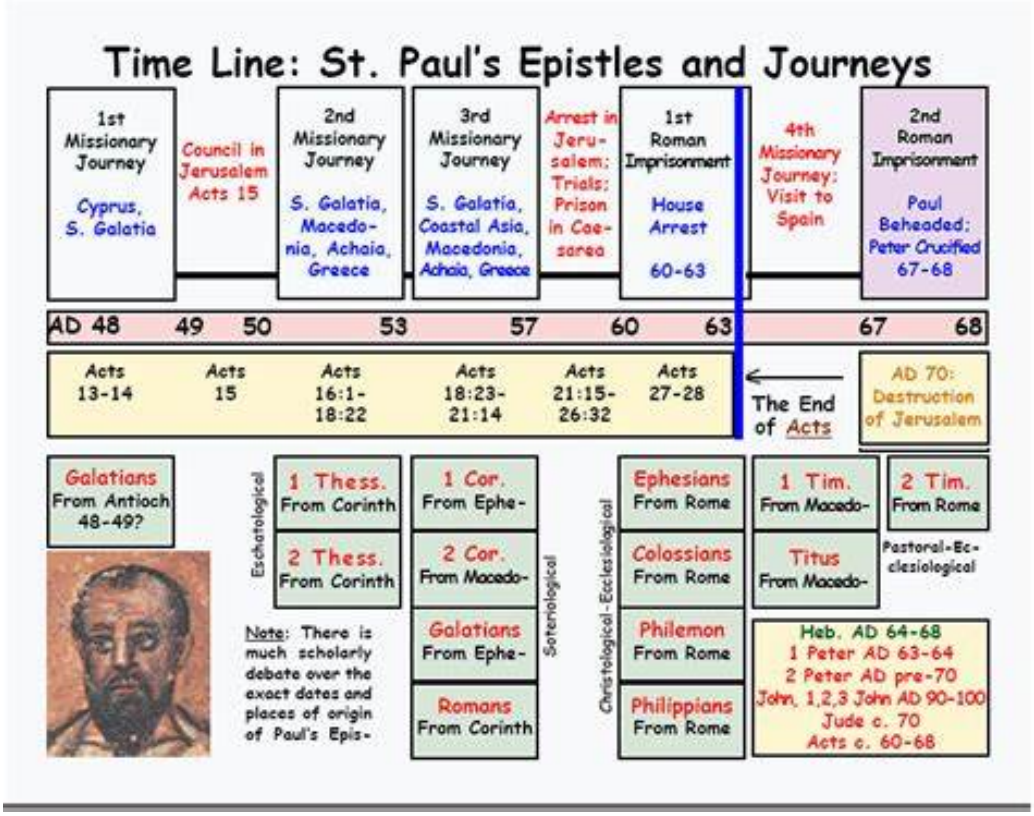
2 Cor. 3:18 [18] *We all…beholding…the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Rom. 8:28-29 [28] *We know that all things work together for good…to those who are the called according to His purpose…*[29] *to be conformed to the image of His Son…*

1 Pet. 4:14 [14] *If you are reproached for the name of Christ…the Spirit of glory…rests upon you.*

ii Second, in the age to come, we will live in a city—New Jerusalem— that is filled with glory.

f. ***If we don't have something to die for, then we don't have anything to live for***. The resolve to love and serve God with all of our heart is essential to our emotional well-being. Many seek in vain to enjoy contentment without seeking to be fully committed to His leadership.


Time Line: St. Paul's Epistles and Journeys
1st Missionary Journey
Cyprus, S. Galatia
Council in Jerusalem Acts 15
2nd Missionary Journey
S. Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, Greece
3rd Missionary Journey
S. Galatia, Coastal Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, Greece
Arrest in Jerusalem; Trials; Prison in Caesarea
1st Roman Imprisonment
House Arrest
60-63
4th Missionary Journey: Visit to Spain
2nd Roman Imprisonment
Paul Beheaded; Peter Crucified
67-68
AD 48 49 50 53 57 60 63 67 68
Acts 13-14
Acts 15
Acts 16:1-18:22
Acts 18:23-21:14
Acts 21:15-26:32
Acts 27-28
The End of Acts
AD 70: Destruction of Jerusalem
Galatians From Antioch 48-49?
Eschatological
1 Thess. From Corinth
2 Thess. From Corinth
1 Cor. From Ephe-
2 Cor. From Macedo-
Galatians From Ephe-
Romans From Corinth
Soteriological
Note: There is much scholarly debate over the exact dates and places of origin of Paul's Epis-
Christological-Ecclesiological
Ephesians From Rome
Colossians From Rome
Philemon From Rome
Philippians From Rome
1 Tim. From Macedo-
Titus From Macedo-
2 Tim. From Rome
Pastoral-Ecclesiological
Heb. AD 64-68
1 Peter AD 63-64
2 Peter AD pre-70
John, 1,2,3 John AD 90-100
Jude c. 70
Acts c. 60-68


MACEDONIA
THRACE
BLACK SEA
BITHYNIA AND PONTUS
GALATIA
Philippi
Neapolis
Amphipolis
Thessalonica
Apollonia
Berea
THASOS
SAMOTHRACE
Troas
MYSIA
LEMNOS
Assos
LESBOS
Pergamum
ASIA
Mitylene
Thyatira
Sardis
Smyrna
Philadelphia
CHIOS
EUBOEA
Athens
Corinth
Cenchreae
ACHAIA
Sparta
SAMOS
Ephesus
Hierapolis
Laodicea
Colossae
Miletus
PATMOS
CARIA
PHRYGIA
Antioch in Pisidia
Iconium
Lystra
Derbe
Ancyra
Caesarea
CAPPADOCIA
COMMAGENE
PAMPHYLIA
Attalia
Perga
LYCIA
Patara
CILICIA
Tarsus
Seleucia Pieria
Antioch
Aleppo
SYRIA
SANTORINI
RHODES
CRETE
CYPRUS
Salamis
Paphos
PHOENICIA
ABILENE
Sidon
Tyre
Ptolemais (Acco)
Caesarea Maritima
Damascus
Jerusalem
JUDEA
NABATEA
EGYPT
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY
Acts 15:36 - 18:22
City
One of the "Seven Churches of Asia" - Rev. 2-3
Paul's Route
ConformingToJesus.com


GREECE
TURKEY
SYRIA
CYPRUS
LEBANON
ISRAEL
JORDAN
AMMAN
DAMASCUS